MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL™

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In a savage era before the dawn of history, four sorcerers committed a heinous crime of torture and murder – and thought they got away with it.

They're about to find out they were wrong.

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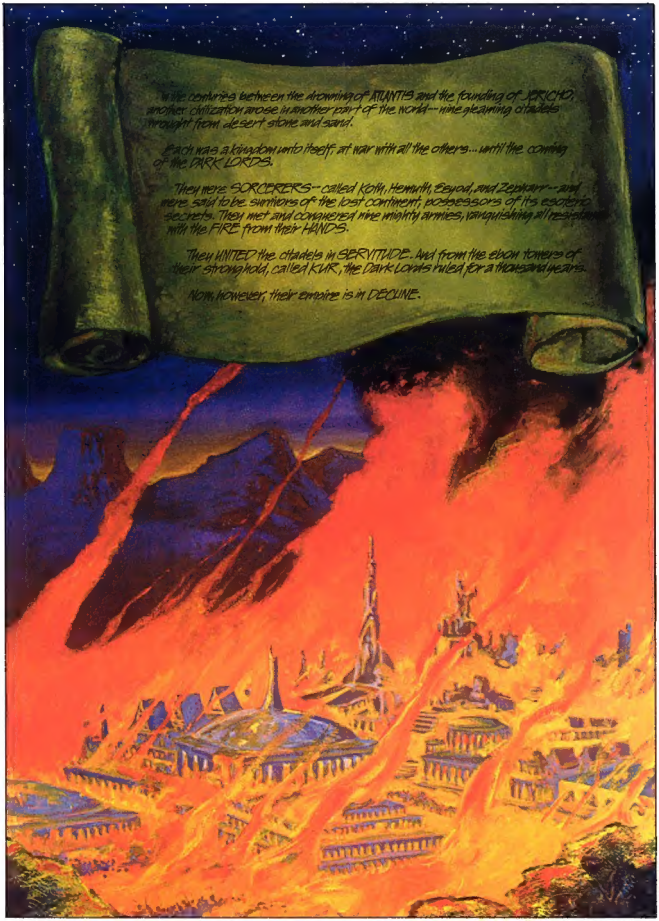
By Steve Gerber & Val Mayerik


In the centuries between the drowning of ATLANTIS and the founding of JERICHO, another civilization arose in another part of the world—nine gleaming citadels wrought from desert stone and sand.
Each was a kingdom unto itself, at war with all the others...until the coming of the DARK LORDS.
They were SORCERERS—called Koth, Haruth, Beyod, and Zephorr—and were said to be survivors of the lost continent, possessors of its esoteric secrets. They met and conquered nine mighty armies, vanquishing all resistance with the FIRE from their HANDS.
They UNITED the citadels in SERVITUDE. And from the ebon towers of their stronghold, called KUR, the Dark Lords ruled for a thousand years.
Now, however, their empire is in DECLINE.

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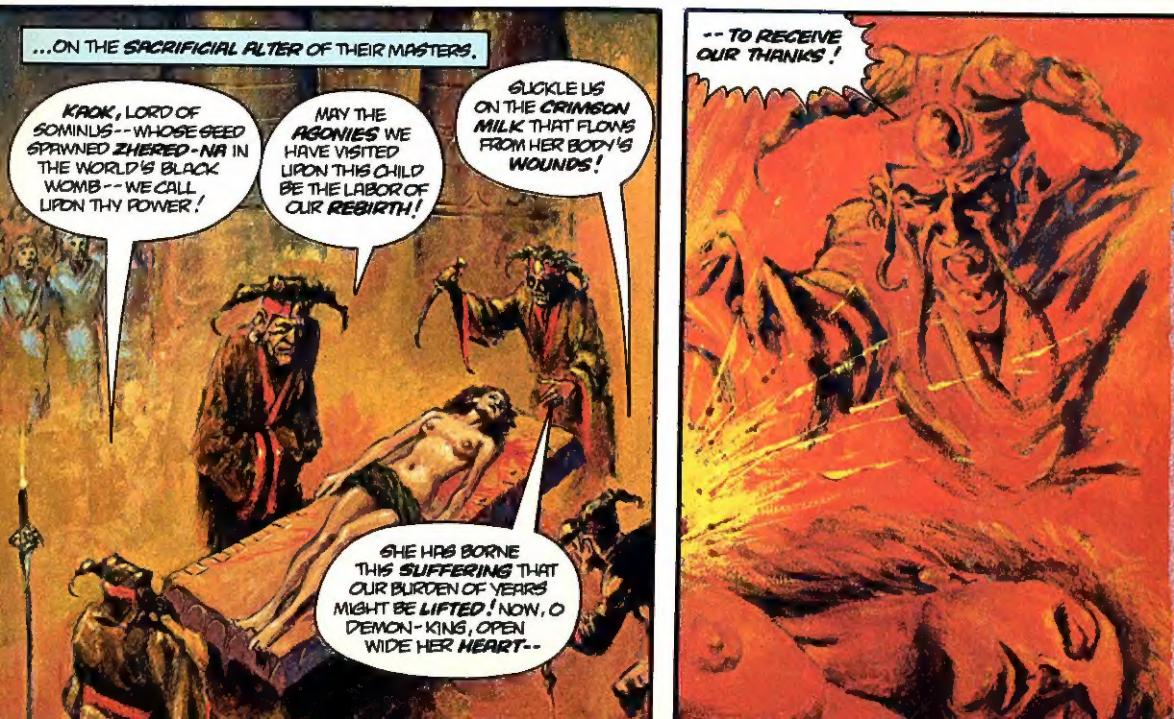
A MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL™
by STEVE GERBER and VAL MAYERIK
Void Indigo™
BOOK ONE:
Tortured Souls
BARBARIC TRIBES, FORMALLY DEEMED UNWORTHY EVEN OF CONQUEST, ARE SWEEPING DOWN FROM THE GLACIATED NORTHLANDS...
...PILLAGING THE ENSLAVED CITIES, SEIZING POWER BY SHEER BRUTE FORCE.
THE SORCERERS' MERCENARY TROOPS SCATTER AND FALL LIKE BROKEN TWIGS BEFORE THE ONSLAUGHT. NEVER HAVE THEY ENCOUNTERED SO FEROCIOUS AN ENEMY, DEATH IN BATTLE SEEMS TO HOLD NO TERROR FOR THESE SAVAGE CHILDREN OF THE FROST.
EVERY MAN AMONG THEM-- FROM THE LOWLIEST SPEARMAN TO THEIR CHIEFTAIN ATH'AGAAR WOULD PREFER TO DIE HERE, BATHED IN HIS OWN STEAMING BLOOD, THAN TO PERISH IN THE BITTER COLD OF THE ADVANCING ICE.

EROK... HAS FALLEN TO ATH'ASAAR.
AS DID TZERAMA.
AS DID BAALAT.
AS DID KEREI.
HOW LONG HAVE WE... ERE THE BARBARIANS MOUNT AN ASSAULT ON KUR ITSELF?
THE TRUTH, MY BROTHERS, IS THAT WE ARE OLD. OUR STRENGTH WANES...
...AND WITH IT, OUR CONTROL OVER THE ARCANE FORCES WHICH IN THE PAST ENSURED OUR SUPREMACY.
AGE HAS NOT SAPPED YOUR TALENT FOR CANDOR, HAS IT, KOTH?
WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE US DO? EVEN WE CANNOT TURN BACK THE SUN AND MOON.
NOR NEED WE, HEMUTH, IT IS NOT THE FLOW OF TIME WE MUST REVERSE--MERELY THE DAMAGE IT HAS DONE TO OUR-SELVES.
AND THE LIVING ORB HAS SHOWN ME A WAY...!


...ON THE SACRIFICIAL ALTER OF THEIR MASTERS.
KAOK, LORD OF SOMINUS--WHOSE SEED SPAWNED ZHERED-NA IN THE WORLD'S BLACK WOMB--WE CALL UPON THY POWER!
MAY THE AGONIES WE HAVE VISITED UPON THIS CHILD BE THE LABOR OF OUR REBIRTH!
SUCKLE US ON THE CRIMSON MILK THAT FLOWS FROM HER BODY'S WOUNDS!
SHE HAS BORNE THIS SUFFERING THAT OUR BURDEN OF YEARS MIGHT BE LIFTED! NOW, O DEMON-KING, OPEN WIDE HER HEART--
--TO RECEIVE OUR THANKS!

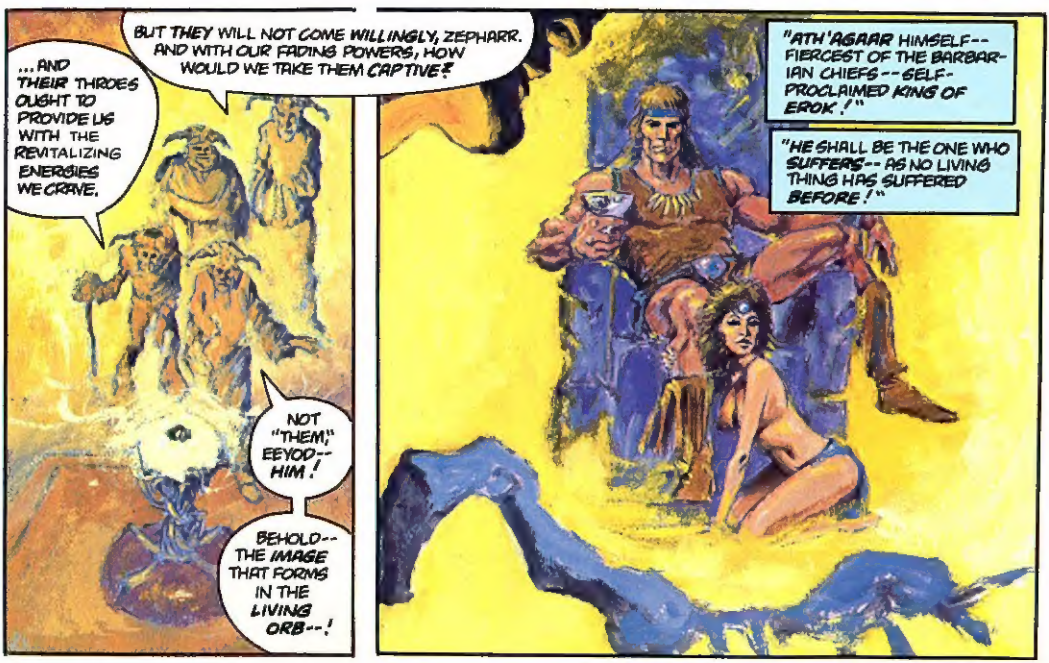
THUS, A DECREE GOES FORTH FROM THE DARK LORDS TO THE FIVE CITADELS STILL UNDER THEIR RULE: HALF THE YOUNG MEN AND HALF THE YOUNG WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE ARE TO MAKE A PILGRIMMAGE.
IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOW, A CEASELESS PROCESSION OF UNSPOILED FLESH WINDS ACROSS THE DESERT TO THE SORCERERS' BLACK FORTRESS.
FOR MANY OF THE YOUTHS, IT IS THEIR FIRST GLIMPSE OF KUR. FOR ALL, IT WILL BE THEIR LAST...
THEY HAVE JOURNEYED HERE TO RELINQUISH THEIR LIVES...

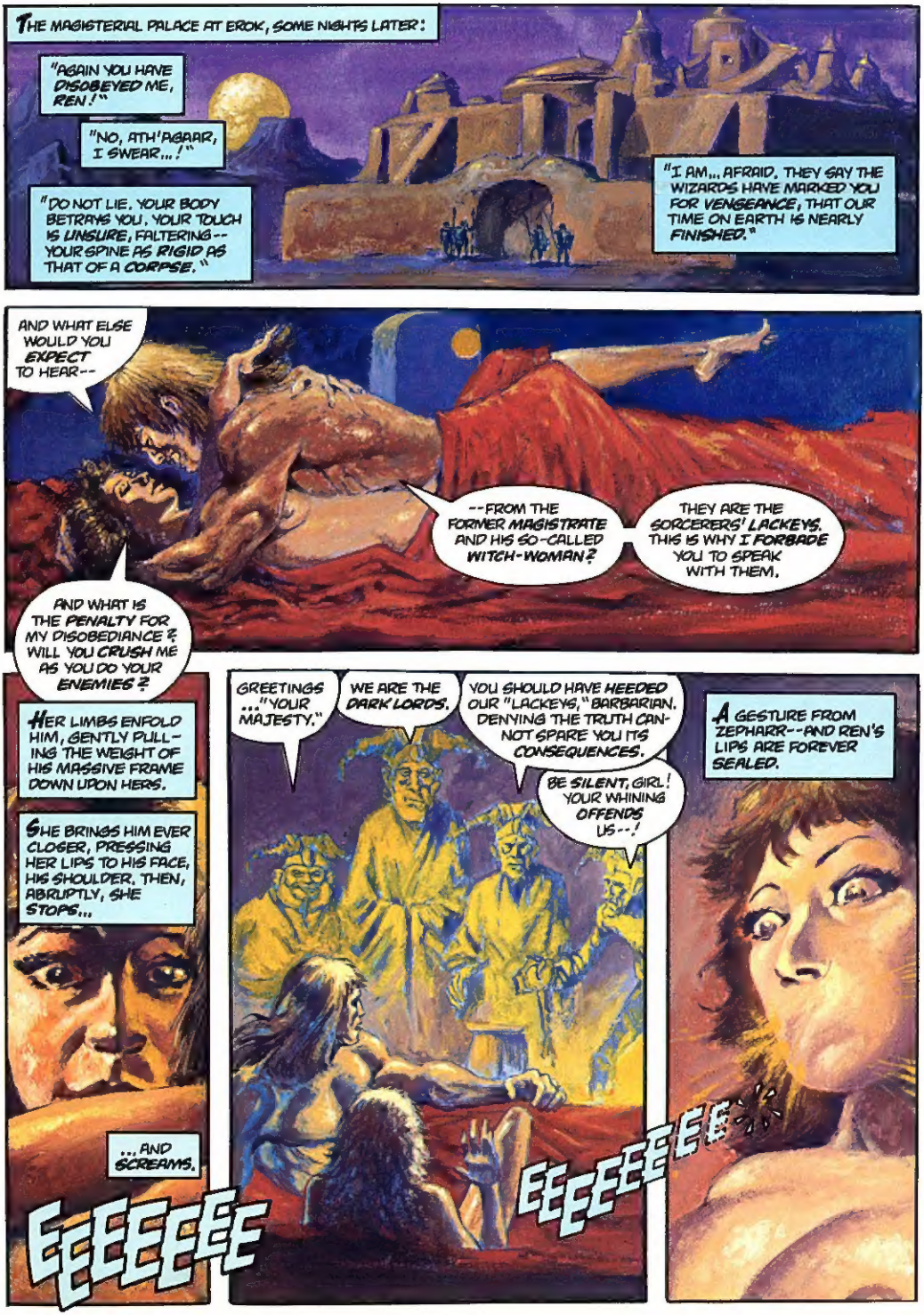
WITH EACH HEINOUS ACT OF TORTURE AND MURDER, THE WIZARDS REGAIN SOME SMALL MEASURE OF THEIR LOST VIGOR.

BUT THOUGH THE BLOOD OF THOUSANDS STAINS THE SLAB...
IT IS NOT ENOUGH!
OUR HANDS REMAIN TWISTED LIKE TALONS! THE CENTURIES REMAIN ETCHED IN OUR FACES!
WE ARE OLD MEN-- STILL!!

WE HAVE TAMED OUR SUBJECTS TOO WELL, KOTH.
FOR GENERATIONS, THE CITADEL-DWELLERS HAVE HAD NOTHING TO FEAR BUT OUR WRATH --NOR ANY ASPIRATION BEYOND THE GRATIFICATION OF THEIR DULLED SENSES.
EVEN IN THE FACE OF DEATH, THEIR YOUNG HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW TO STRUGGLE--OR WHY. THEIR LISTLESSNESS BLUNTS THEIR WILL TO LIVE.
AND WHEN ONE'S LIFE IS NOT HELD PRECIOUS, ONE'S AGONIES BECOME TRIVIAL.
THEY DIE...TOO EASILY?

WELL, THEN, WE HAVE OUR SOLUTION, HAVEN'T WE? SURELY, WITH ADEQUATE EFFORT, THE FORMS OF THESE SAVAGES CAN BE RENT AND BROKEN...
SO IT WOULD APPEAR.
CONSIDER HOW SWIFTLY THE CITADELS FELL TO THE INVADERS. FOR THE BARBARIANS, DEATH WITHOUT RESISTANCE IS UNTHINKABLE.


BUT THEY WILL NOT COME WILLINGLY, ZEPHARR. AND WITH OUR FADING POWERS, HOW WOULD WE TAKE THEM CAPTIVE?
...AND THEIR THRODES OUGHT TO PROVIDE US WITH THE REVITALIZING ENERGIES WE CRAVE.
NOT "THEM," EEYOD--HIM!
BEHOLD--THE IMAGE THAT FORMS IN THE LIVING ORB--!
"ATH'AGAAR HIMSELF--FIERCEST OF THE BARBARIAN CHIEFS--SELF-PROCLAIMED KING OF EROK!"
"HE SHALL BE THE ONE WHO SUFFERS--AS NO LIVING THING HAS SUFFERED BEFORE!"


THE MAGISTERIAL PALACE AT EROK, SOME NIGHTS LATER:
"AGAIN YOU HAVE DISOBEYED ME, REN!"
"NO, ATH'AGAAR, I SWEAR...!"
"DO NOT LIE. YOUR BODY BETRAYS YOU. YOUR TOUCH IS UNSURE, FALTERING--YOUR SPINE AS RIGID AS THAT OF A CORPSE."
"I AM... AFRAID. THEY SAY THE WIZARDS HAVE MARKED YOU FOR VENGEANCE, THAT OUR TIME ON EARTH IS NEARLY FINISHED."
AND WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU EXPECT TO HEAR--
--FROM THE FORMER MAGISTRATE AND HIS SO-CALLED WITCH-WOMAN?
THEY ARE THE SORCERERS' LACKEYS. THIS IS WHY I FORBADE YOU TO SPEAK WITH THEM.
AND WHAT IS THE PENALTY FOR MY DISOBEDIANCE? WILL YOU CRUSH ME AS YOU DO YOUR ENEMIES?
HER LIMBS ENFOLD HIM, GENTLY PULLING THE WEIGHT OF HIS MASSIVE FRAME DOWN UPON HERS.
SHE BRINGS HIM EVER CLOSER, PRESSING HER LIPS TO HIS FACE, HIS SHOULDER. THEN, ABRUPTLY, SHE STOPS...
...AND SCREAMS.
EEEEEEEE
GREETINGS ..."YOUR MAJESTY."
WE ARE THE DARK LORDS.
YOU SHOULD HAVE HEEDED OUR "LACKEYS," BARBARIAN. DENYING THE TRUTH CANNOT SPARE YOU ITS CONSEQUENCES.
BE SILENT, GIRL! YOUR WHINING OFFENDS US--!
EEEEEEEE
A GESTURE FROM ZEPHARR--AND REN'S LIPS ARE FOREVER SEALED.

FOR ONE GHASTLY MOMENT, ATH'AGAAR GAPES AT THE HIDEOUSLY DISFIGURED FACE OF HIS CONCUBINE.
THEN, HIS ANGER ERRUPTS...
DREGS OF HELL!! I'LL CLEAVE YOUR SKULLS FOR THIS--!
ANOTHER SIMPLE GESTURE...
...AND THE BARBARIAN'S BLADE BECOMES A SERPENT, COILING TIGHT ABOUT HIM...
YAARGH
...PINNING HIS ARMS, SQUEEZING THE BREATH FROM HIS LUNGS.
IN MUTE, HELPLESS ANQUISH, REN WATCHES,..AS HE TOPPLES.
YOUR REIGN IN EROK IS ENDED, ATH'AGAAR.
BUT YOUR TRIBULATIONS HAVE YET TO BEGIN!
YOU--AND YOUR WHORE--WILL BE ACCOMPANYING US--
--ON A KIND OF JOURNEY.

"FIRST, WE SHALL RETURN TO KUR...
"...AND FROM THERE, PROCEED INTO REALMS UNCHARTED IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE."

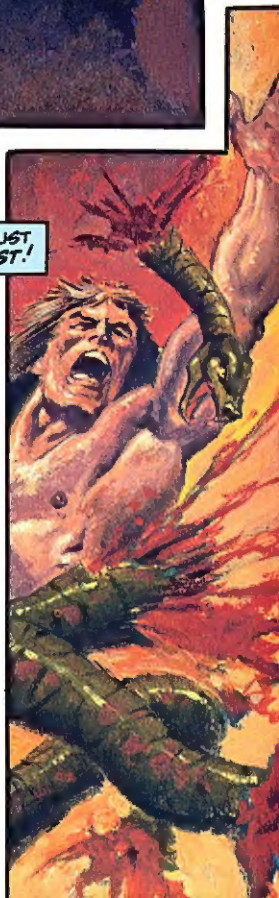
IN A WAY, BARBARIAN, YOU ARE FORTUNATE.
PAIN HAS BEEN KNOWN TO OPEN MANY A DOOR TO THE SPIRIT.
YOU MIGHT EVEN GAZE UPON THE FACE OF KAOK HIMSELF!
OR, YOU MAY SIMPLY DIE-- LIKE THE STUPID SAVAGE YOU ARE.

OBSERVE, ATH'AGAAR, WHAT WE DO TO THE WOMAN.
WE HAVE FAR GREATER TORMENTS IN MIND FOR YOU.
DEVILS-- RELEASE HER!!

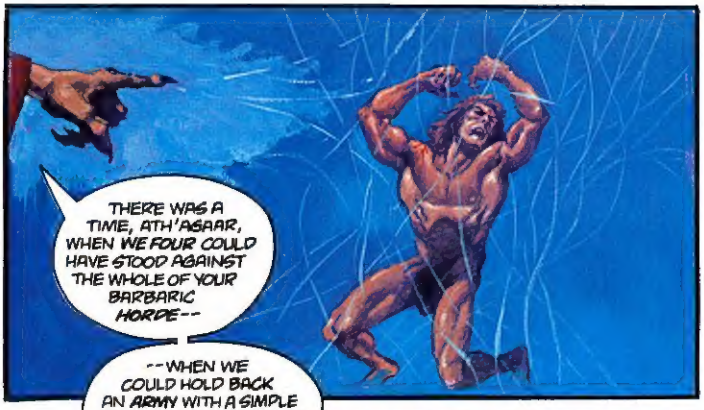
THEY DO NOT. AND SO, BELLOWING WITH RAGE, SUMMONING EVERY OUNCE OF STRENGTH AND WILL...

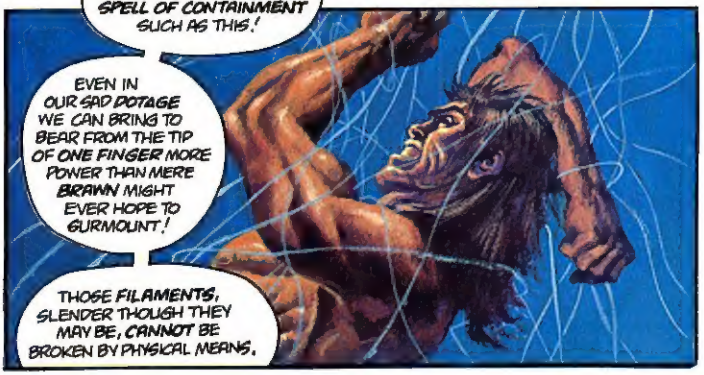
...HE DRAWS A LONG, TORTUROUS BREATH, FORCING HIS CHEST TO EXPAND, PITTING HIS NAKED BREAST AGAINST THE SERPENT'S STEELY COILS...

...UNTIL ONE OR THE OTHER...
...MUST BURST!



FREE HER, SORCERERS-- NOW!!--
--BEFORE YOUR WRETCHED NECKS GO THE WAY OF YOUR SERPENT!
YOU WOULD THREATEN US-- HERE, WITHIN THE WALLS OF OUR OWN STRONG-HOLD?
HAVE YOU NO GRASP OF WHAT FORCES YOU SEEK TO OPPOSE?

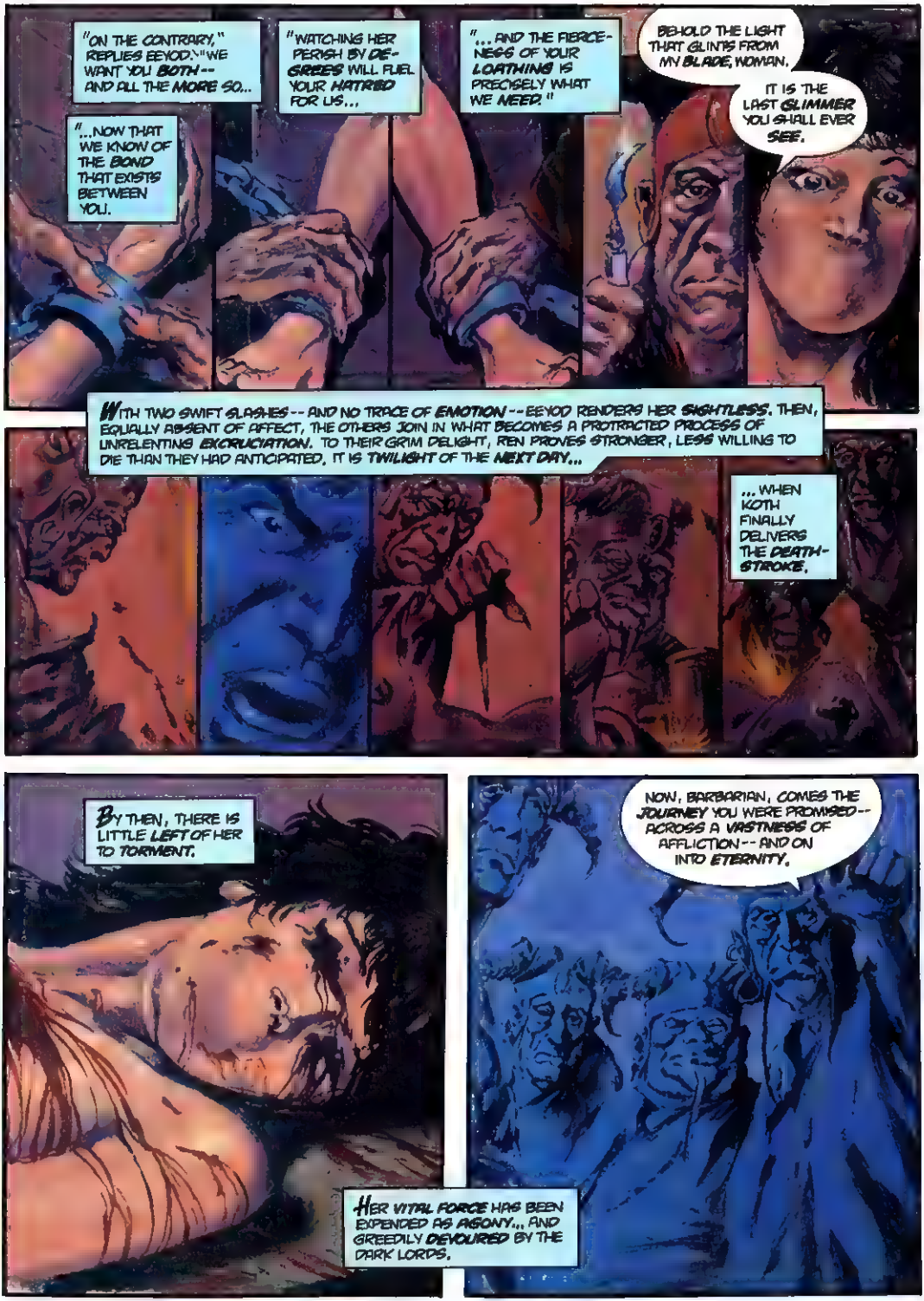

THERE WAS A TIME, ATH'ASAAR, WHEN WE FOUR COULD HAVE STOOD AGAINST THE WHOLE OF YOUR BARBARIC HORDE--
--WHEN WE COULD HOLD BACK AN ARMY WITH A SIMPLE SPELL OF CONTAINMENT SUCH AS THIS!


EVEN IN OUR SAD DOTAGE WE CAN BRING TO BEAR FROM THE TIP OF ONE FINGER MORE POWER THAN MERE BRAWN MIGHT EVER HOPE TO GURMOUNT!
THOSE FILAMENTS, SLENDER THOUGH THEY MAY BE, CANNOT BE BROKEN BY PHYSICAL MEANS.

STRUGGLE IF YOU MUST-- BUT IT WILL NOT ALTER YOUR FATE, OR THE WOMAN'S.
NO!! REN!!

HE ACTUALLY CARES FOR HER, KOTH. WE ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF GENUINE PASSION.
TOO MANY CENTURIES HAVE GONE BY SINCE WE HAVE FELT WITH SUCH INTENSITY. I ENVY HIM.
I TRUST THAT WON'T DETER YOU FROM OUR MEAN LITTLE TASK, KOTH.
NO.

MONSTERS!! ARE YOUR SOULS AS WITHERED AS YOUR ROTTING FLESH??
SHE'S DONE YOU NO HARM--!
I AM THE ONE YOU WANT TO KILL!


"ON THE CONTRARY," REPLIES EEYOD. "WE WANT YOU BOTH -- AND ALL THE MORE SO...
"...NOW THAT WE KNOW OF THE BOND THAT EXISTS BETWEEN YOU.
"WATCHING HER PERISH BY DEGREES WILL FUEL YOUR HATRED FOR US...
"...AND THE FIERCENESS OF YOUR LOATHING IS PRECISELY WHAT WE NEED."
BEHOLD THE LIGHT THAT GLINTS FROM MY BLADE, WOMAN.
IT IS THE LAST GLIMMER YOU SHALL EVER SEE.
WITH TWO SWIFT SLASHES -- AND NO TRACE OF EMOTION -- EEYOD RENDERS HER SIGHTLESS. THEN, EQUALLY ABSENT OF AFFECT, THE OTHERS JOIN IN. WHAT BECOMES A PROTRACTED PROCESS OF UNRELENTING EXCRUCIATION. TO THEIR GRIM DELIGHT, REN PROVES STRONGER, LESS WILLING TO DIE THAN THEY HAD ANTICIPATED. IT IS TWILIGHT OF THE NEXT DAY...
...WHEN KOTH FINALLY DELIVERS THE DEATH-STROKE.
BY THEN, THERE IS LITTLE LEFT OF HER TO TORMENT.
HER VITAL FORCE HAS BEEN EXPENDED AS AGONY... AND GREEDILY DEVOURED BY THE DARK LORDS.
NOW, BARBARIAN, COMES THE JOURNEY YOU WERE PROMISED -- ACROSS A VASTNESS OF AFFLICTION -- AND ON INTO ETERNITY.

AS HE IS MADE TO LIE IN REN'S BLOOD, AS THE SHACKLES CLAMP ABOUT HIS WRISTS AND ANKLES, ATH'AGAAR CONFRONTS THE SOBER FACT THAT THIS TIME THERE WILL BE NO ESCAPE. BEREFT OF ALL DEFENSES, EVEN CLOTHING, HE IS LIKE A FORLORN CHILD --ENTIRELY AT THE MERCY OF THIS PACK OF SICK OLD MEN.
AS THE TORMENT PROGRESSES, THE INDIVIDUAL WOUNDS LOSE ALL SIGNIFICANCE. THE PAIN BECOMES AN ENVIRONMENT. HE IS ENVELOPED BY IT, SHEATHED IN IT-- AND THE ONLY RETREAT FROM IT IS IN THE MEMORY OF ANOTHER KIND OF EXISTENCE. SLOWLY, THE MENTAL WALLS THAT SEPARATE HIS PAST FROM THE HERE-AND-NOW BEGIN TO CRUMBLE.

His suffering is made to last for days, tirelessly, and with a surgeon's precision. The dark lords subject his body to an unremitting succession of punishments. He is scorched with hot irons and scourged with barbed whips. He is gashed, punctured, hammered, and mauled.
The bracing cold of the north, the heft of his father's sword, his boyhood triumphs, his initiation into manhood -- he relives them all, again and again, in a torrent... until each recollection melds with all the others, and with the present ... and they all come to feel like pain.
victory is pain.
pain is pain.
Ren's embrace is pain.
And yet, even with his mind in disarray, even when his body has been maimed and mutilated almost beyond recognition, Ath'agaar cannot surrender his grip on life. The will to survive is ingrained in him too deeply. His rage still smoulders... and the dark lords savor it.

UNTIL, LATE ON THE THIRD NIGHT...
DEATH HOVERS AT YOUR HEAD, ATH'AGAAR --UPON THE TIP OF THIS JEWELED SPIKE.
YOUR ORDEAL IS OVER. THE END IS COME.
NO!... NOT UNTIL I CLAIM MY ...VENGEANCE!...I WILL HUNT YOU DOWN ...SLAY YOUR VERY SOULS...
...IF IT TAKES... ALL ETERNITY!
TO WHICH KOTH RESPONDS WITH A SNEER OF CONTEMPT... AND A HAMMERBLOW.
AT LAST, ATH'AGAAR LIES STILL.
AND EIGHT SATISFIED EYES, ALIVE WITH THE SPARKLE OF YOUTH, GAZE DOWN ON HIS BROKEN BODY.
YOU SHALL HAVE NO REVENGE, BARBARIAN. YOU WERE MEANT TO PERISH AT OUR HANDS. FOR HAD YOU NEVER RIDDEN INTO OUR MIDST, OUR EMPIRE WOULD SURELY HAVE FALLEN. AND HAD YOU LOVED LIFE LESS, YOU WOULD NOT NOW BE DEAD.
SAVE YOUR PREACHMENTS, KOTH... UNTIL THE BRUTE IS ON THE PYRE.
ZEPHARR IS RIGHT, KOTH. THE EFFECT WILL FADE IF KAOK'S HOSTS ARE DENIED THEIR FEAST.
JUDGE NOT THE GODS' APPETITES BY YOUR OWN, HEMUTH.
THEY DO NOT HUNGER ALL THE TIME.
HEMUTH GASPS...
...NOT AT THE INSULT, AS THE OTHERS FIRST PRESUME...

...BUT AT THE TWITCHING OF ATH'ASRAR'S HAND AS THE SHACKLES ARE REMOVED!
ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY, HIS EYE OPENS -- GROTESQUELY UNFOCUSSED, UNSEEING --
--AND FROM DEEP IN HIS THROAT COMES A RAGGED, PRIMORDIAL CRY OF OUTRAGE!
HE IS NOT CONSCIOUS IN ANY ORDINARY SENSE. HE CANNOT REASON, CANNOT FEEL, CANNOT SPEAK--YET HIS SOUL REFUSES TO ABANDON ITS MORTAL SHELL.
HIS HAND SHOOTS AUTOMATICALLY TO HIS FOREHEAD. HIS MANGLED FINGERS SEIZE THE THING IMBEDDED IN HIS BRAIN...
...AND HE PULLS!

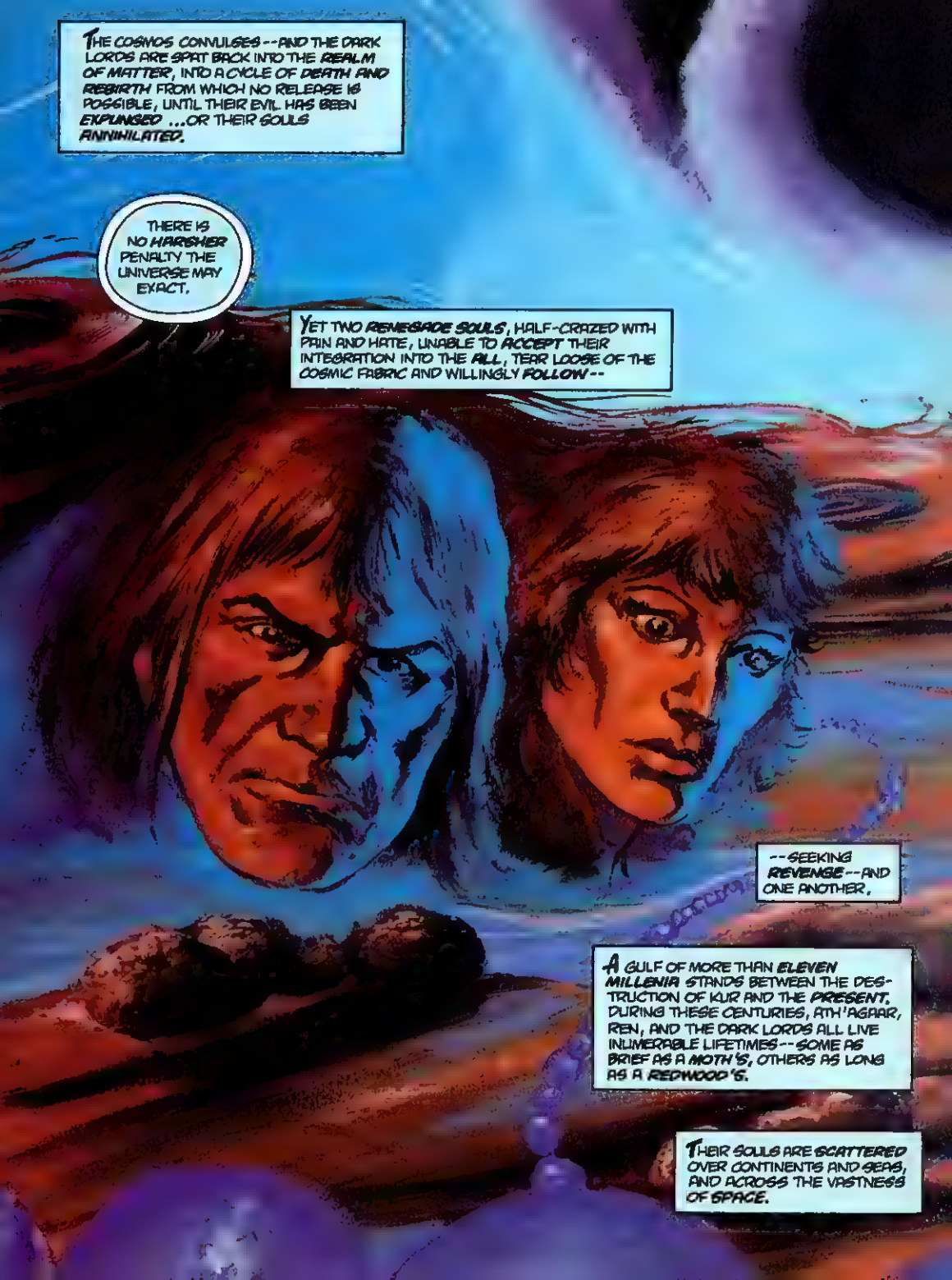
REMARKABLE... LIKE A DEMON GONE MAD... A CREATURE OF PURE RAGE...!
URAGH
HE SEEMS NOT EVEN TO SEE US...!
LOOK HOW HIS BODY SPASMS. HE DANCES AN IDIOT DANCE.
SURELY HE CANNOT LIVE LONG IN SUCH A STATE...?
NO...
...BUT EVEN SO--WITH THAT SPIKE IN HIS HAND--HE POSES A SINGULAR THREAT.
"HIS UNCONTROLLED 'DANCE' CARRIES HIM PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO THE LIVING ORB."
I WOULD HARDLY DEEM THAT A THREAT, ZEPHARR.
WE SHALL SIMPLY DEPRIVE HIM OF THE MEANS TO DO ANY DAMAGE.
THIS LAST ACT OF CRUELTY PROVES TO BE THE DARK LORDS' UNDOING.
THE BOLT OF MAGIC SEVERS ATH'AGAAR'S HAND FROM THE WRIST...
...AND SENDS IT FLYING...
...DIRECTLY INTO THE CENTER OF THE LIVING ORB!
THE MYSTIC EYE BURSTS LIKE A BOIL...
...SPEWING FORTH A CATACLYSMIC CLOUD OF FORCE...
...A SWIRLING SPIRAL OF PRE-TERNATURAL ENERGIES THAT SWELLS TO ENGULF THE DOMED CHAMBER AND ALL WITHIN IT.

BEFORE A CRY OF ALARM CAN BE UTTERED, THE DARK LORDS AND ATH'AGAAR HAVE PERISHED, THEIR BODIES FLAYED, THEIR BONES GROUND TO POWDER.
THE SPIRAL CONTINUES TO EXPAND--SHATTERING THE WALLS OF KUR, REDUCING THE FRAGMENTS TO EBON GRANULES.
AND THEN, WITH NOTHING TO CONTAIN IT, THE DARK FORCE SPREADS OVER THE LAND,

None of the nine citadels will see another dawn.
The deathstorm churns through the cities -- razing spire and stable, temple and hearth -- pulverizing stone into dust.
In a matter of hours, an entire civilization has been obliterated.
It's only artifact, the instrument of its destruction, is borne away across the sands...

AMID THIS THUNDEROUS DEVASTATION, THE DYING WAILS OF THE PEOPLE ARE TOO LOW--AND TOO BRIEF --EVEN TO BE HEARD.
...WAFTED NEARLY A THOUSAND MILES, ALMOST TO THE SEA, ON THE LAST WISPS OF THE SPIRAL CLOUD.
A HAUNTING SILENCE SETTLES ON THE DESERT. THE WIND IS STILL. NO CREATURE STIRS.
BUT THE AIR AND THE LAND ARE CHARGED WITH MAGIC, AND WILL REMAIN SO FOR CENTURIES.
...WAITING.

FOR EACH PHENOMENON THAT OCCURS IN THE MATERIAL WORLD HAS CONSEQUENCES FAR BEYOND IT. BE IT THE FALLING OF A RAINDROP OR OF A CULTURE, ITS EFFECTS RIPPLE ACROSS EVERY PLANE OF REALITY.
SOME, LIKE THE RAINDROP, VIBRATE IN HARMONY WITH THE COSMIC ORDER.
BUT THE SHRIEKING OF A HUNDRED THOUSAND ENTITIES USHERED PREMATURELY TO THEIR DEATHS PRODUCES DISCORD IN THE SPHERE OF SOULS.
THEIR SPIRIT-VOICES HOWL AS ONE: "PUNISH THE SORCERERS! LET THEM KNOW NO PEACE UNTIL THEY HAVE PAID FOR THEIR ATROCITIES!"


THE COSMOS CONVULSES--AND THE DARK LORDS ARE SPAT BACK INTO THE REALM OF MATTER, INTO A CYCLE OF DEATH AND REBIRTH FROM WHICH NO RELEASE IS POSSIBLE, UNTIL THEIR EVIL HAS BEEN EXPUNGED ...OR THEIR SOULS ANNIHILATED.
THERE IS NO HARSHER PENALTY THE UNIVERSE MAY EXACT.
YET TWO RENEGADE SOULS, HALF-CRAZED WITH PAIN AND HATE, UNABLE TO ACCEPT THEIR INTEGRATION INTO THE ALL, TEAR LOOSE OF THE COSMIC FABRIC AND WILLINGLY FOLLOW--
--SEEKING REVENGE--AND ONE ANOTHER,
A GULF OF MORE THAN ELEVEN MILLENIA STANDS BETWEEN THE DESTRUCTION OF KUR AND THE PRESENT. DURING THESE CENTURIES, ATH'AGAAR, REN, AND THE DARK LORDS ALL LIVE INUMERABLE LIFETIMES--SOME AS BRIEF AS A MOTH'S, OTHERS AS LONG AS A REDWOOD'S.
THEIR SOULS ARE SCATTERED OVER CONTINENTS AND SEAS, AND ACROSS THE VASTNESS OF SPACE.

THEY PASS THROUGH EACH OF THESE MORTAL SOJOURNS WITH NO MEMORY OF WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE. THAT KNOWLEDGE STAYS HIDDEN IN THE DEPTHS OF THEIR BEING, FAR BELOW CONSCIOUSNESS...
...AWAITING DISCOVERY BY A MIND WHICH CAN TRANSCEND ITSELF, WHICH DARES TO LOOK BEYOND ITS OWN LIMITS TO PERCEIVE ITS CONNECTION TO THE INFINITE.
IN ALL THEIR MYRAID LIFE-TIMES, HOWEVER, ONLY ONE SOUL AMONG THEM ACHIEVES THIS GOAL.
IRONICALLY, IT IS THAT OF KOTH.
REBORN IN A VASTLY DIFFERENT FORM, HE IS LIVING WHAT HE KNOWS MAY BE HIS FINAL INCARNATION ON THE MATERIAL PLANE.
BUT TO ASSURE THAT THIS DEATH WILL BE HIS LAST, THERE IS A TASK HE MUST PERFORM--AN ERRAND OF ATONEMENT FOR CRIMES PAST.
HE MUST ENGINEER HIS OWN MURDER--
--AND THUS BRING TOGETHER THE SOULS OF ATH'AGAAR AND THE DARK LORDS FOR A FINAL CONFRONTATION.
ONLY IN THIS WAY WILL THEIR EONS-OLD CONFLICT EVER BE RESOLVED.
BY AN IMMENSE EFFORT OF WILL, HE SEPARATES HIS EIDOLON--HIS ASTRAL FORCE--FROM HIS PHYSICAL SHELL.

...AND PROJECTS IT ON A JOURNEY BEYOND THE MORTAL VEIL, INTO THE CONTINUUM OF **PURE SPIRIT**...

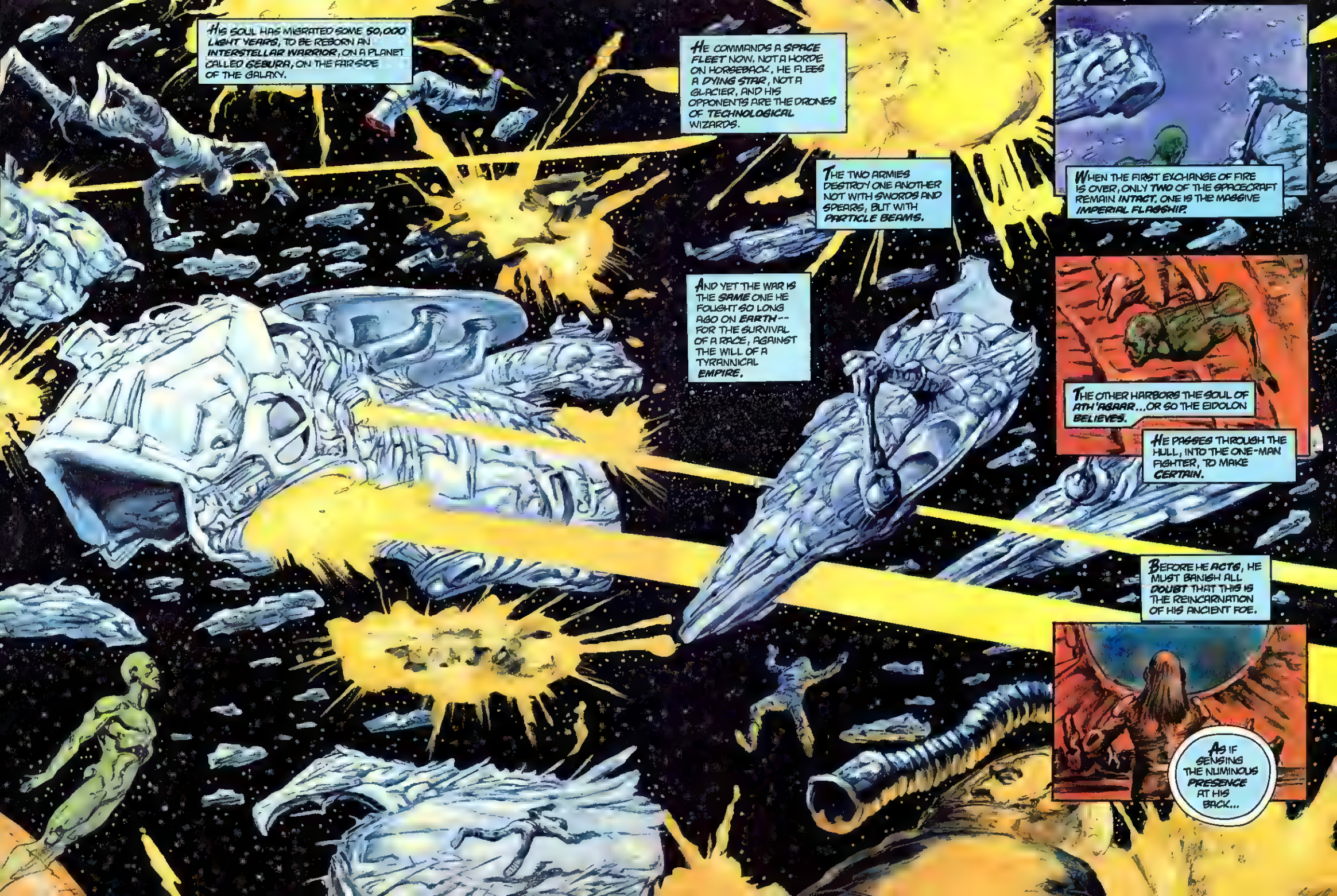
...THE **VOID INDIGO!**

THROUGH THIS HORIZONLESS, LIQUID SPACE FROM WHICH ALL THINGS--MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL--ORIGINATE, THREADS **THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING.**

EACH PERFECT, PEARL-LIKE BEAD ALONG ITS INFINITE LENGTH GLIMMERS WITH THE LIGHT OF A SOUL. FROM ITS **POSITION** ON THE CHAIN CAN BE DETERMINED THE **CONDITION** OF THAT SOUL AND ITS **LOCATION** IN THE COSMOS.

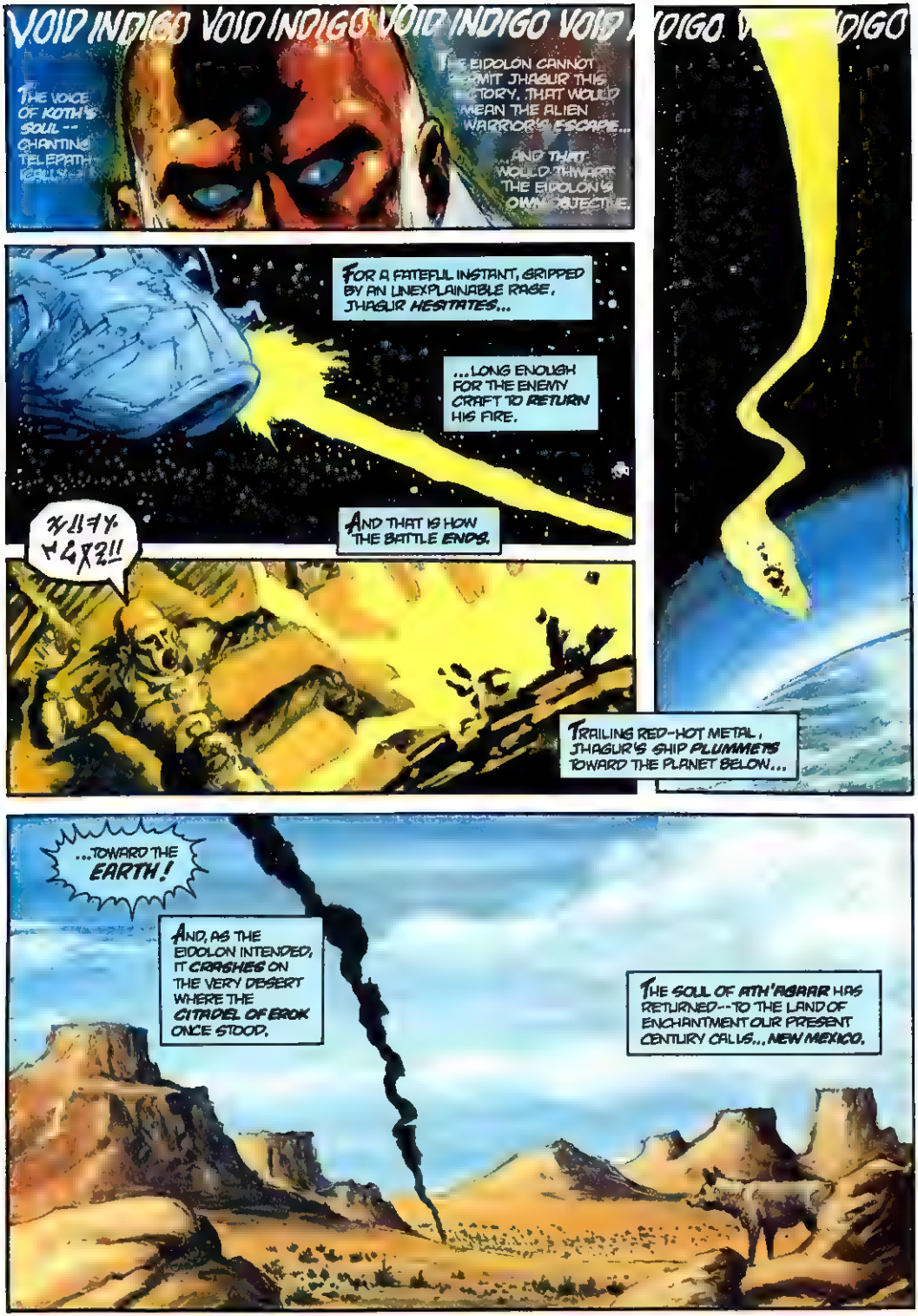
REN AND THE FORMER DARK LORDS RESIDE ON **EARTH.**

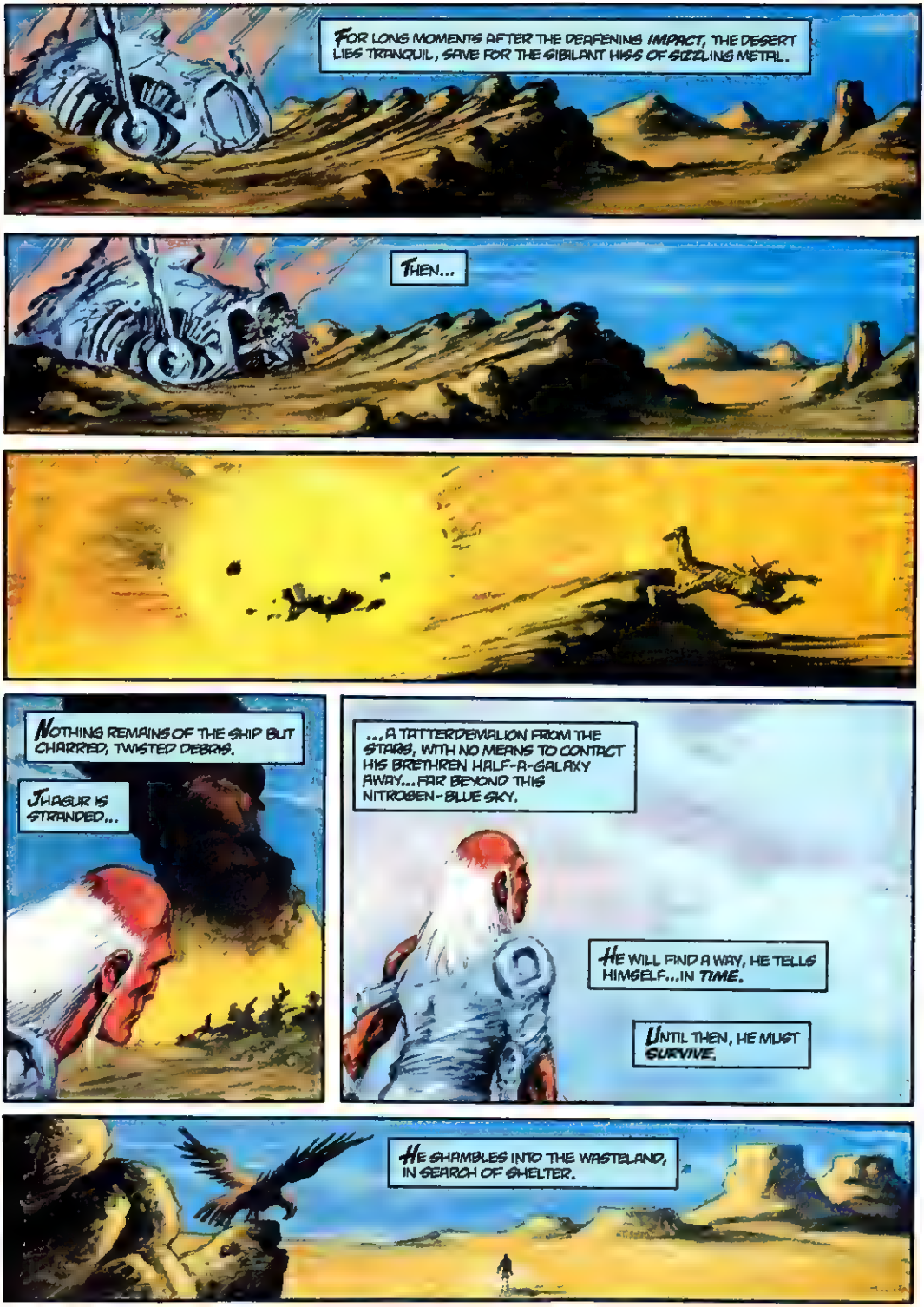
ATH'AGAAR, THOUGH, IS... **ELSEWHERE.**


His soul has migrated some 50,000 light years, to be reborn an interstellar warrior, on a planet called Gebura, on the far side of the galaxy.
He commands a space fleet now, not a horde on horseback. He flees a dying star, not a glacier, and his opponents are the drones of technological wizards.
The two armies destroy one another not with swords and spears, but with particle beams.
And yet the war is the same one he fought so long ago on Earth -- for the survival of a race, against the will of a tyrannical empire.
When the first exchange of fire is over, only two of the spacecraft remain intact. One is the massive imperial flagship.
The other harbors the soul of Ath'agrar... or so the eidolon believes.
He passes through the hull, into the one-man fighter, to make certain.
Before he acts, he must banish all doubt that this is the reincarnation of his ancient foe.
As if sensing the numinous presence at his back...

...THE STAR-PILOT TURNS.
HIS NAME IS JHAGUR... AND HIS ASPECT IS UTTERLY ALIEN.
HIS GAZE, INDIGO AND EMPTY AS THE VOID, STABS AT THE TRANSPARENT FORM OF THE STARTLED EIDOLON.
FOR THOUGH THIS CREATURE RESEMBLES THE BARBARIAN NOT AT ALL...
...HIS FOREHEAD BEARS A CURIOUS BIRTHMARK...
...IN THE PRECISE LOCATION OF THE WOUND FROM THE JEWELED SPIKE!
HALTINGLY, THE EIDOLON'S DISCARNATE HAND REACHES OUT...
...TO FIND THAT ATH'AGAAR'S FURY AND HIS LUST FOR VENGEANCE ABIDE THERE UNDIMINISHED BY TIME OR SPACE.
SUDDENLY...
SHWPOOM
...JHAGUR'S SHIP PITCHES VIOLENTLY!
THE IMPERIAL SHIP HAS RESUMED THE ATTACK--AND THE FIGHTER SUSTAINS A DIRECT HIT!
ENGINES DAMAGED, POWER SWIFTLY EBBING, JHAGUR IS LEFT NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO FLEE!

SHUTTING DOWN ALL SYSTEMS BUT MINIMAL LIFE SUPPORT, HE CHANNELS THE CRAFT'S REMAINING POWER TO THE TACHYON DRIVE.
AND, WITH THE ENEMY CLOSE BEHIND, HE HURTLES ACROSS LIGHT YEARS, THROUGH THE TWISTED MAZE OF META-SPACE.
THROUGHOUT THE FEVERISH FLIGHT, THE EIDOLON HOVERS OVER JHAGUR, IN SILENT COMMUNICATION WITH THE ALIEN'S UNCONSCIOUS...
...SUBTLY INFLUENCING THE COURSE OF THE CHASE...
...UNTIL THE TINY SHIP'S POWER IS ALL BUT DEPLETED.
BEREFT AGAIN OF ALTERNATIVES...
...JHAGUR BANKS--AND OPENS FIRE!
PARTICLE BLASTS RIP THE HULL OF THE IMPERIAL CRAFT TO SIZZLING RIBBONS. A SECOND HIT WILL DESTROY HER.
BUT BEFORE JHAGUR CAN DELIVER THE MORTAL BLOW...
VOID INDIGO... VOID INDIGO... VOID INDIGO...
...A HAUNTING, HATEFULLY FAMILIAR VOICE IN HIS MIND DISTRACTS HIM!

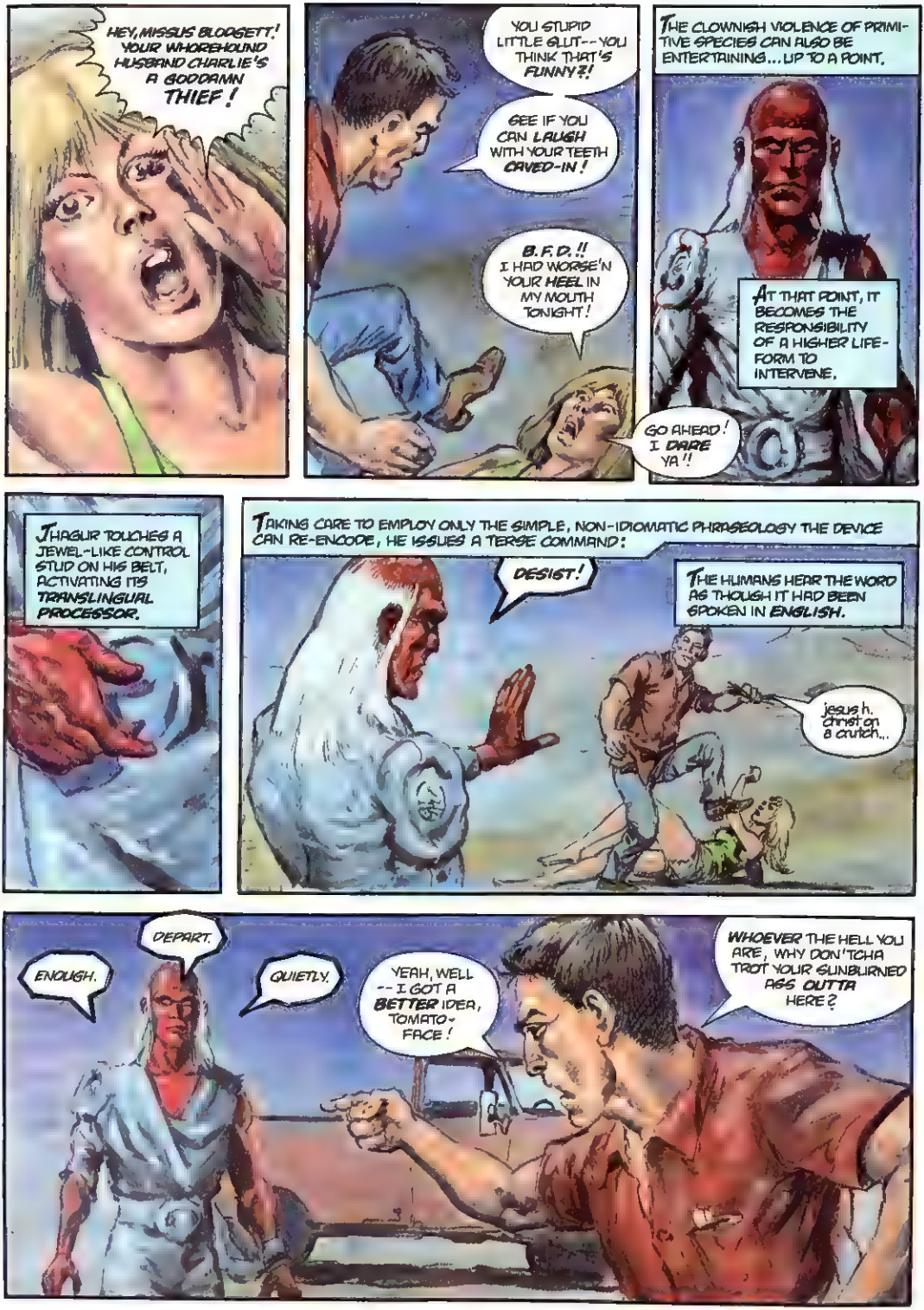

VOID INDIGO VOID INDIGO VOID INDIGO VOID
THE VOICE OF KOTH'S SOUL -- CHANTING TELEPATHICALLY...
THE EIDOLON CANNOT PERMIT JHAGUR THIS VICTORY. THAT WOULD MEAN THE ALIEN WARRIOR'S ESCAPE...
...AND THAT WOULD THWART THE EIDOLON'S OWN OBJECTIVE.
FOR A FATEFUL INSTANT, GRIPPED BY AN UNEXPLAINABLE RAGE, JHAGUR HESITATES...
...LONG ENOUGH FOR THE ENEMY CRAFT TO RETURN HIS FIRE.
AND THAT IS HOW THE BATTLE ENDS.
TRAILING RED-HOT METAL, JHAGUR'S SHIP PLUMMETS TOWARD THE PLANET BELOW...
...TOWARD THE EARTH!
AND, AS THE EIDOLON INTENDED, IT CRASHES ON THE VERY DESERT WHERE THE CITADEL OF BROK ONCE STOOD.
THE SOUL OF ATH'ASARR HAS RETURNED--TO THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT OUR PRESENT CENTURY CALLS... NEW MEXICO.


FOR LONG MOMENTS AFTER THE DEAFENING IMPACT, THE DESERT LIES TRANQUIL, SAVE FOR THE GIBILANT HISS OF SIZZLING METAL.
THEN...
NOTHING REMAINS OF THE SHIP BUT CHARRED, TWISTED DEBRIS.
JHAGUR IS STRANDED...
...A TATTERDEMALION FROM THE STARS, WITH NO MEANS TO CONTACT HIS BRETHREN HALF-A-GALAXY AWAY...FAR BEYOND THIS NITROGEN-BLUE SKY.
HE WILL FIND A WAY, HE TELLS HIMSELF...IN TIME.
UNTIL THEN, HE MUST SURVIVE.
HE SHAMBLES INTO THE WASTELAND, IN SEARCH OF SHELTER.

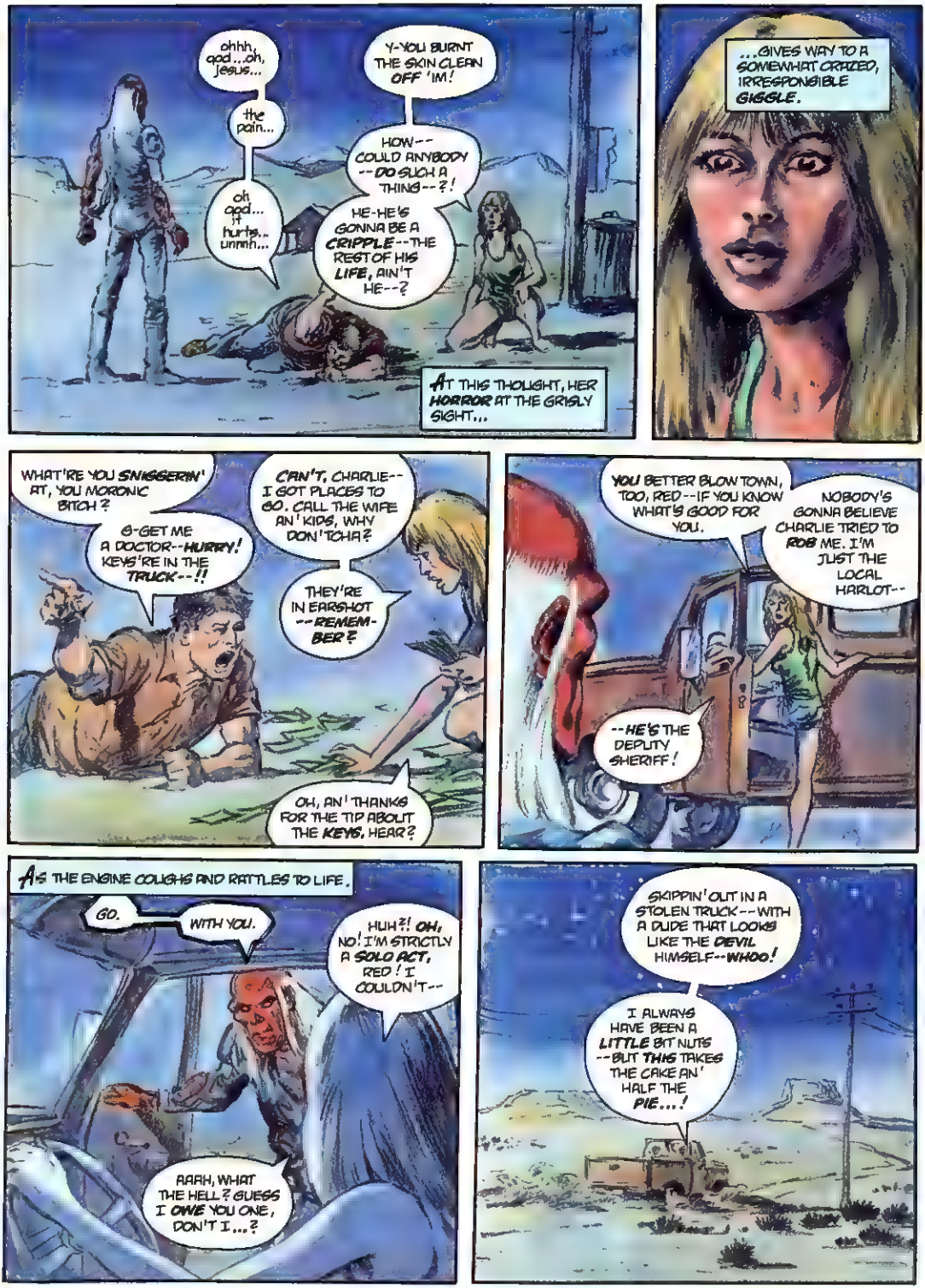
QUIMBY, NEW MEXICO:
DAYS AND NIGHTS OF AIMLESS PERAMBULATION FINALLY LEAD JHAGUR TO THIS EVIDENCE THAT THE PLANET MAY SUPPORT SAPIENT LIFE.
WARILY, AND WITH CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM, HE INSPECTS THE BOXLIKE DWELLINGS.
IN ONE AFTER ANOTHER, HE DISCOVERS ESSENTIALLY THE THE SAME SCENE:
HA HA HA
GROUPINGS OF LATERALLY BISYMMETRICAL LIFE-FORMS, USUALLY BIPEDAL, GATHERED IN A SINGLE ROOM...
HEEE HA HA
...THEIR ATTENTION RIVETED ON A PRIMITIVE, ONE-WAY TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVICE.
HO-HOO AHA
ONLY DETAILS--THE SPECIMENS' NUMBER, GENDER, ARRANGEMENT, SPECIFIC GRAVITY--VARY.
PROTO-SENTIENTS...!
NEITHER INTELLIGENCE NOR TECHNOLOGY HAS EVOLVED SUFFICIENTLY HERE TO ASSIST HIS RETURN TO HIS PEOPLE.
HE CONTINUES HIS EXPLORATIONS, DISHEARTENED.

NEAR THE EDGE OF TOWN, HE COMES UPON AN EXCEPTION:
A LONE, DECREPIT HABITATION WHERE THE FLICKERING LIGHT AND TINNY VOICE OF THE SAD LITTLE SCREEN DO NOT GREET HIS APPROACH.
INTRIGUED, HE DRAWS CLOSER...
...HOPING TO LEARN HOW THESE BEINGS BEHAVE WHEN NOT IN A STATE OF ELECTRONICALLY-INDUCED TORPOR.
INSIDE, A MALE AND FEMALE "PROTO-SENTIENT", LIMBS INTERTWINED, ROLL AND JOUNCE NOISILY ABOUT ON A CUSHIONED RECTANGULAR PLATFORM.
EROGENIC FRENZY.
JHAGUR HAS WITNESSED SIMILARLY FRANTIC MATING ACTIVITY ON OTHER WORLDS, AMONG OTHER BACKWARD SPECIES, BUT IT NEVER FAILS TO FASCINATE--AND APPALL.
FOR GEBURIANS, COMPOSURE, PRECISION, AND SILENCE CONSTITUTE THE HALLMARKS OF THE ART.
HE OBSERVES THE ANTICS TO THEIR PREDICTABLE CONCLUSION, THEN TURNS TO LEAVE... HIS MOOD ODDLY LIGHTENED.
THIS PLEASES HIM. HIS EXILE MAY PROVE MARGINALLY MORE BEARABLE IF THIS WORLD CAN PROVIDE AN OCCASIONAL ENTERTAINMENT.
HOWEVER, EVEN THIS MEAGER CONSOLATION IS SHORT-LIVED.
NOOOOO

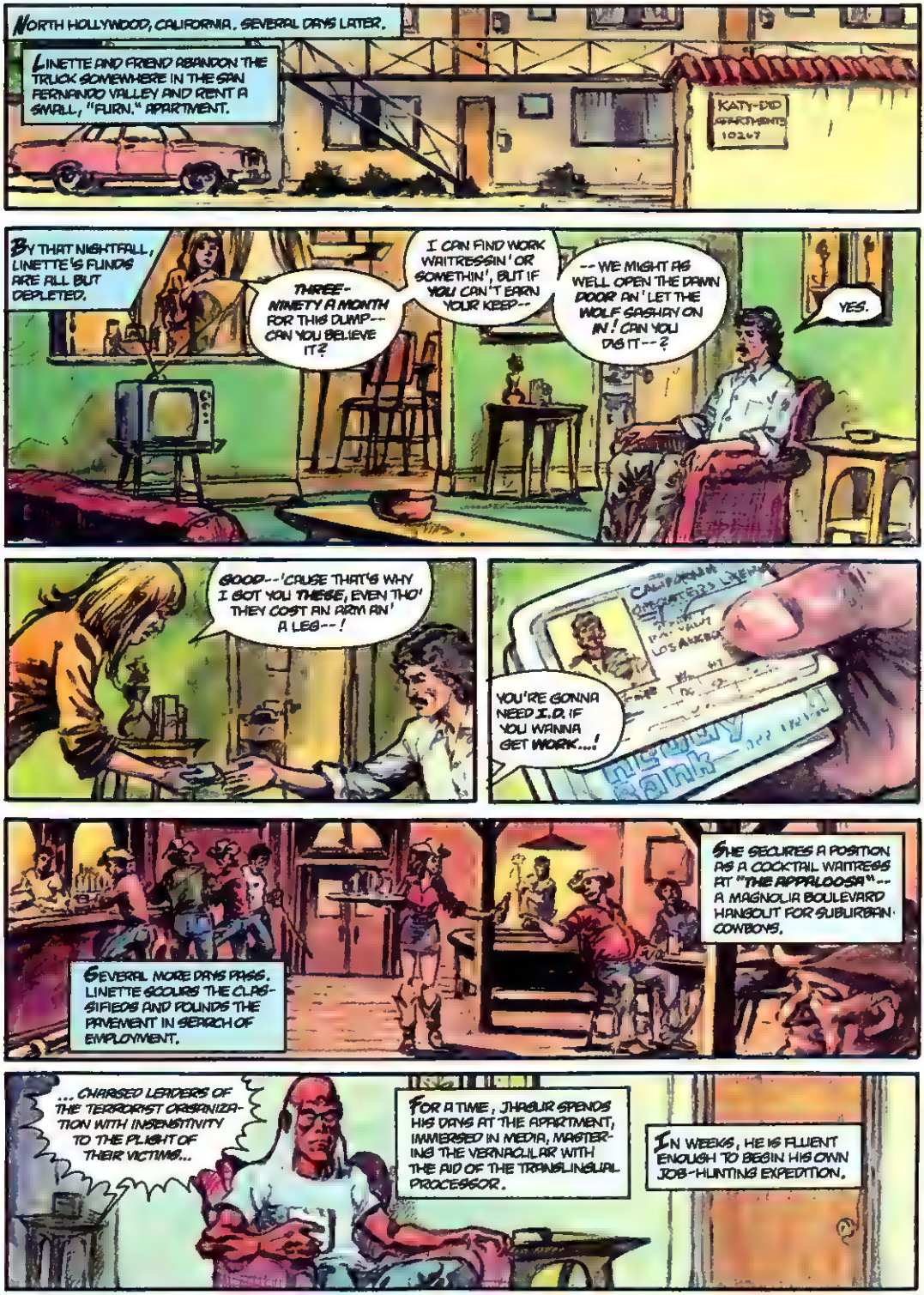
:UNH: CHARLIE... STOP IT!... WHAT'RE YOU POKIN' AROUND IN MY PURSE FOR?
I DID NOT! YOU TAKE THAT BACK! THAT'S MY L.A. MONEY!
I'M SAVIN' UP TO BLOW THIS NO-HORSE TOWN!
I FIGGER I'M THE ONE OUGHTTA GET PAID TONIGHT. YOU JUST LAID THERE LIKE A DEAD GOOSE!
HELL, LINETTE -- YOU DON'T NEED MONEY FOR THAT! YOU CAN GET T' LOS ANGELEZE SAME WAY YOU GOT T' QUIMBY--
--HITCH A RIDE WITH A HORNY TRUCKER!
I-I'M WARNIN' YOU, CHARLIE--YOU BETTER GIMME BACK THAT MONEY!
'CAUSE IF YOU DON'T--
--I'LL WRING YOUR NECK, YOU EGG-SUCK GON OF A BITCH!
UNNHF
HELP! THIEF! THIEF!
CHARLIE BLODGETT'S A THIE-E-EF!!
DAMN, LINETTE-- SHUT THE HELL UP!
I GOT A WIFE AN' KIDS PRACTICALLY IN EARSHOT--!
:OOWWW:
DOGGONE, CHARLIE--THAT'S TRUE, AIN'T IT? I FORGOT ALL ABOUT 'EM--!


HEY, MISSUS BLODGETT! YOUR WHOREHOUND HUSBAND CHARLIE'S A GODDAMN THIEF!
YOU STUPID LITTLE SLUT--YOU THINK THAT'S FUNNY?!
SEE IF YOU CAN LAUGH WITH YOUR TEETH CAVED-IN!
B.F.D.!! I HAD WORSE'N YOUR HEEL IN MY MOUTH TONIGHT!
THE CLOWNISH VIOLENCE OF PRIMITIVE SPECIES CAN ALSO BE ENTERTAINING... UP TO A POINT.
AT THAT POINT, IT BECOMES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A HIGHER LIFE-FORM TO INTERVENE.
GO AHEAD! I DARE YA!!
THAGUR TOUCHES A JEWEL-LIKE CONTROL STUD ON HIS BELT, ACTIVATING ITS TRANSLINGUAL PROCESSOR.
TAKING CARE TO EMPLOY ONLY THE SIMPLE, NON-IDIOMATIC PHRASEOLOGY THE DEVICE CAN RE-ENCODE, HE ISSUES A TERSE COMMAND:
DESIST!
THE HUMANS HEAR THE WORD AS THOUGH IT HAD BEEN SPOKEN IN ENGLISH.
jesus h. christ on a crutch...
ENOUGH.
DEPART.
QUIETLY.
YEAH, WELL -- I GOT A BETTER IDEA, TOMATO-FACE!
WHOEVER THE HELL YOU ARE, WHY DON'TCHA TROT YOUR SUNBURNED ASS OUTTA HERE?

CHARLIE'S HEAVY BOOT RISES AGAIN, BUT AS IT BEGINS ITS DESCENT TO LINETTE'S FACE...
... A BOLT OF INDIGO ENERGY FLASHES FROM THE ALIEN'S EYES...
... AND INTERCEPTS IT.
FOR AN INSTANT THE AIR HANGS THICK WITH SMOKE AND STEAM...
... AND THE STENCH OF SOMETHING BURNING.
CHARLIE TOPPLES, HIS FULL WEIGHT FALLING ON THE SKELETAL FOOT.
THE BONES SPLINTER.
AUDIBLY.

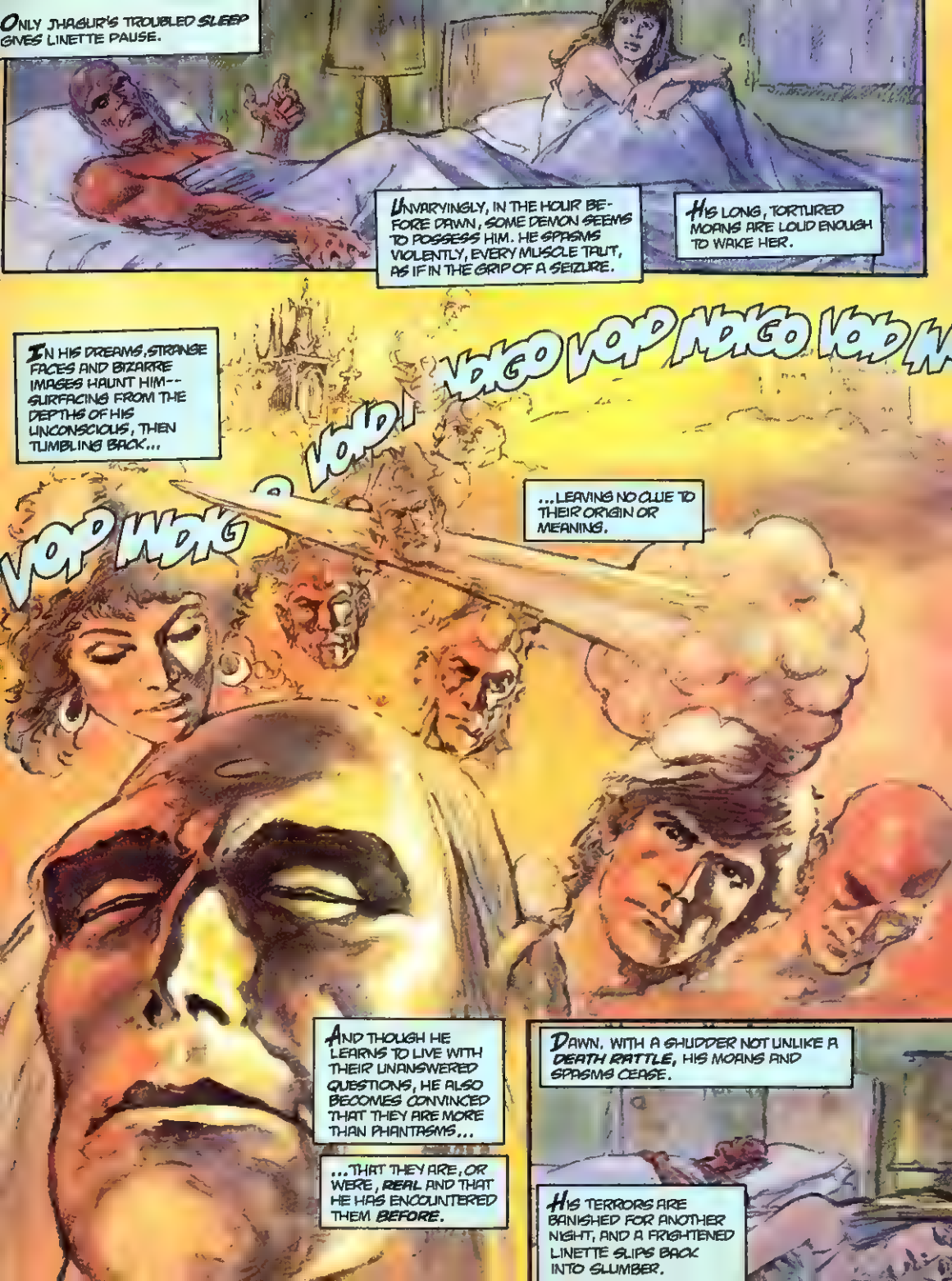

ohhh, god...oh, jesus...
the pain...
oh god... it hurts... unnh...
Y-YOU BURNT THE SKIN CLEAN OFF 'IM!
HOW-- COULD ANYBODY --DO SUCH A THING--?!
HE-HE'S GONNA BE A CRIPPLE--THE REST OF HIS LIFE, AIN'T HE--?
AT THIS THOUGHT, HER HORROR AT THE GRISLY SIGHT...
...GIVES WAY TO A SOMEWHAT CRAZED, IRRESPONSIBLE GIGGLE.
WHAT'RE YOU SNIGGERIN' AT, YOU MORONIC BITCH?
G-GET ME A DOCTOR--HURRY! KEYS'RE IN THE TRUCK--!!
CAN'T, CHARLIE-- I GOT PLACES TO GO. CALL THE WIFE AN' KIDS, WHY DON'TCHA?
THEY'RE IN EARSHOT --REMEMBER?
OH, AN' THANKS FOR THE TIP ABOUT THE KEYS, HEAR?
YOU BETTER BLOW TOWN, TOO, RED--IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU.
NOBODY'S GONNA BELIEVE CHARLIE TRIED TO ROB ME. I'M JUST THE LOCAL HARLOT--
--HE'S THE DEPUTY SHERIFF!
AS THE ENGINE COUGHS AND RATTLES TO LIFE.
GO.
WITH YOU.
HUH?! OH, NO! I'M STRICTLY A SOLO ACT, RED! I COULDN'T--
AAAH, WHAT THE HELL? GUESS I OWE YOU ONE, DON'T I...?
SKIPPIN' OUT IN A STOLEN TRUCK--WITH A DUDE THAT LOOKS LIKE THE DEVIL HIMSELF--WHOO!
I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN A LITTLE BIT NUTS --BUT THIS TAKES THE CAKE AN' HALF THE PIE...!

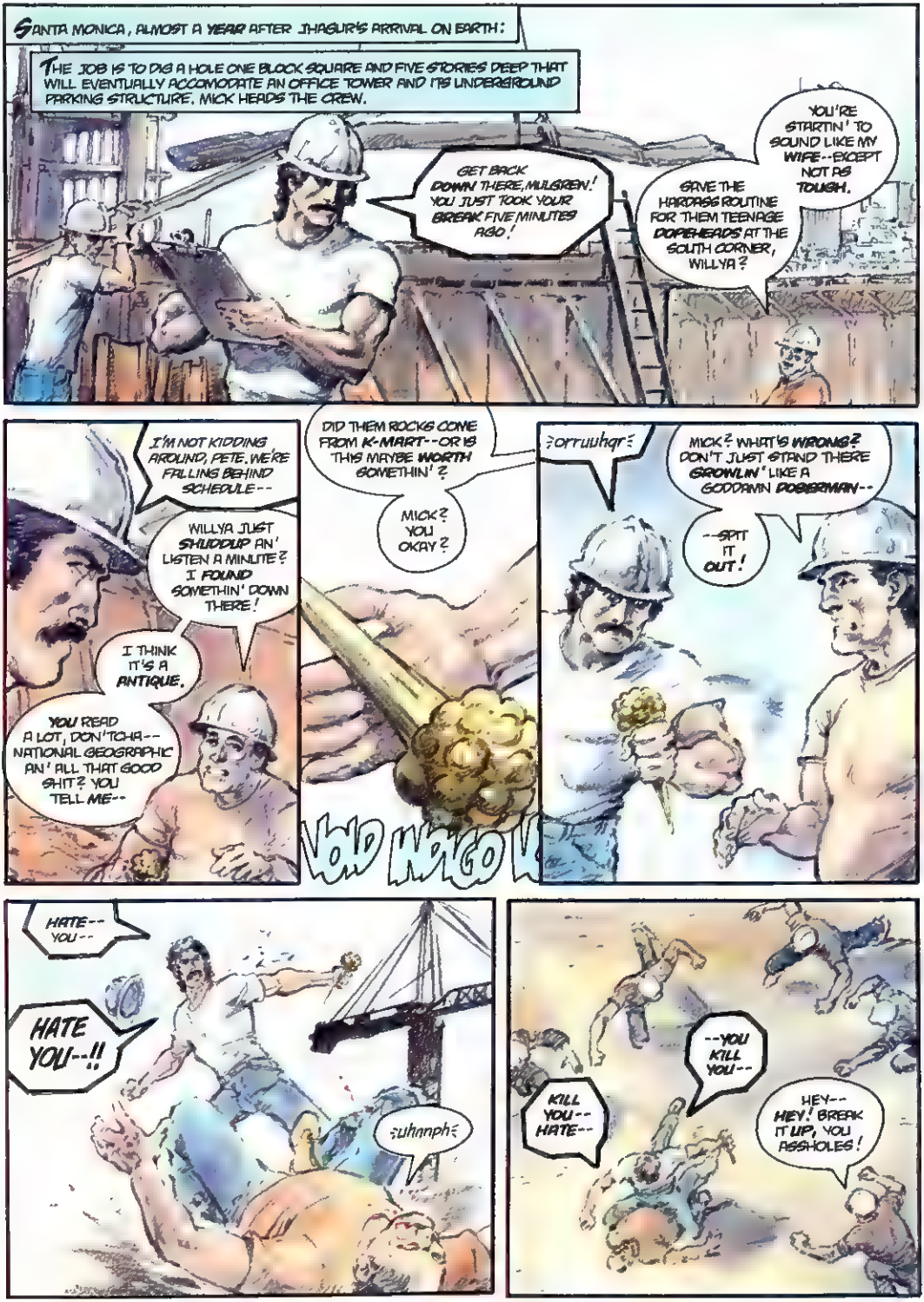
I'M GONNA STAY ON THE BACK ROADS--STEER CLEAR OF THE INTERSTATES--IF THAT'S OKAY WITH YOU.
BY THE WAY, I'M LINETTE CUMPSTON. YOU GOT A NAME?
JHASUR.
UH-HUH. FIRST NAME "MICK," NO DOUBT.
MICK.
FUN-NEE, WELL, MICK, YOU GOT ANY WAY TO MAKE YOURSELF LOOK LESS BRITISH--NOW'S THE TIME!
ELSEWISE, I MIGHT HAVETA PUT A BAG OVER YOUR HEAD!
SEE, THERE'S COPS ON THIS ROAD, TOO--NOT MANY, BUT SOME--
--AN' YOU'RE NOT EXACTLY GONNA BE HARD TO IDENTIFY, SAVVY?
JHASUR TOUCHES ANOTHER JEWEL-LIKE STUD ON HIS BELT...
...ACTIVATING ITS PHOTO-CHROMATIC CAMOUFLAGING FUNCTION.
LINETTE GAPES, AS HE SEEMS TO DISSOLVE IN SHIFTING PATTERNS OF REFRACTION.
A MOMENT LATER, HIS FEATURES SLIP BACK INTO SHARP RESOLUTION...
...HIS TRUE NATURE UTTERLY CONCEALED BY A TECHNOLOGICAL FORM OF PROTECTIVE COLORATION.
MICK?
JHASUR?
GOD ALMIGHTY DOB...!? HA HA
HAHAHAAHOOH
...?


NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA. SEVERAL DAYS LATER.
LINETTE AND FRIEND ABANDON THE TRUCK SOMEWHERE IN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AND RENT A SMALL, "FURN." APARTMENT.
KATY-DID APARTMENTS 10267
BY THAT NIGHTFALL, LINETTE'S FUNDS ARE ALL BUT DEPLETED.
THREE-NINETY A MONTH FOR THIS DUMP--- CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?
I CAN FIND WORK WAITRESSIN' OR SOMETHIN', BUT IF YOU CAN'T EARN YOUR KEEP--
--WE MIGHT AS WELL OPEN THE DAMN DOOR AN' LET THE WOLF SASHAY ON IN! CAN YOU DIG IT--?
YES.
GOOD--'CAUSE THAT'S WHY I GOT YOU THESE, EVEN THO' THEY COST AN ARM AN' A LEG--!
YOU'RE GONNA NEED I.D. IF YOU WANNA GET WORK...!
SEVERAL MORE DAYS PASS. LINETTE SCOURS THE CLASSIFIEDS AND POUNDS THE PAVEMENT IN SEARCH OF EMPLOYMENT.
SHE SECURES A POSITION AS A COCKTAIL WAITRESS AT "THE APPALOOSA"--A MAGNOLIA BOULEVARD HANGOUT FOR SUBURBAN COWBOYS.
... CHARGED LEADERS OF THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION WITH INSENSITIVITY TO THE PLIGHT OF THEIR VICTIMS...
FOR A TIME, JHASUR SPENDS HIS DAYS AT THE APARTMENT, IMMERSED IN MEDIA, MASTERING THE VERNACULAR WITH THE AID OF THE TRANSLINGUAL PROCESSOR.
IN WEEKS, HE IS FLUENT ENOUGH TO BEGIN HIS OWN JOB-HUNTING EXPEDITION.

LACKING EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS (WHICH LINETTE NEGLECTED TO PURCHASE) AND WITH A MARKEDLY "FOREIGN" ACCENT TO HIS ENGLISH, JHAGUR FINDS HIS OPPORTUNITIES LIMITED.
HE DRIFTS FROM ONE STRENUOUS JOB TO THE NEXT, ACCRUING MORE IN MUSCLE MASS THAN IN WAGES.
OVER TIME, THE SLENDER STAR-PILOT DEVELOPS A HARDIER PHYSIQUE, TOUGHENED BY EXPOSURE TO THE ELEMENTS.
UNDER THE VOLCAN
EVENINGS, WHILE LINETTE DISPENSES BEER AND CHEER, HE STAYS ALONE AT HOME, ENGROSSED IN STUDY. HE READS OMNIVOROUSLY: DARWIN AND THE BIBLE, EINSTEIN AND VELIKOVSKY, HOMER AND HAROLD ROBBINS.
THE COMBINATION OF HARD WORK AND INTELLECTUAL EXERTION AGREES WITH HIM, AS DO LINETTE'S UNDEMANDING COMPANIONSHIP AND HER ALMOST SIMPLE-MINDED ACCEPTANCE OF HIS ALIEN-NESS.

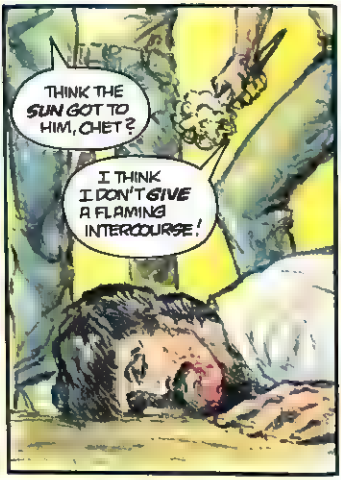
As his exile stretches into months, Jhasur concedes the possibility that he may spend the rest of his life on earth. Having admitted this, his adjustment proceeds with surprising ease.
The planet's customs and culture, its people and topography--even its blue sky--all seem to "resonate" in some heretofore unvisited chamber of his personality.
When he doffs his belt--and with it his camouflage--to change or shower or sleep--Linette takes the transformation in stride, acknowledging it merely with a conspiratorial giggle.
They form a bond of mutual acceptance and trust--like that between a sister and brother--which is almost without reservation.


ONLY JHAGUR'S TROUBLED SLEEP GIVES LINETTE PAUSE.
UNVARYINGLY, IN THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN, SOME DEMON SEEMS TO POSSESS HIM. HE SPASMS VIOLENTLY, EVERY MUSCLE TAUT, AS IF IN THE GRIP OF A SEIZURE.
HIS LONG, TORTURED MOANS ARE LOUD ENOUGH TO WAKE HER.
IN HIS DREAMS, STRANGE FACES AND BIZARRE IMAGES HAUNT HIM--SURFACING FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS UNCONSCIOUS, THEN TUMBLING BACK...
VOOD
VOOD
VOOD
...LEAVING NO CLUE TO THEIR ORIGIN OR MEANING.
AND THOUGH HE LEARNS TO LIVE WITH THEIR UNANSWERED QUESTIONS, HE ALSO BECOMES CONVINCED THAT THEY ARE MORE THAN PHANTASMS...
...THAT THEY ARE, OR WERE, REAL AND THAT HE HAS ENCOUNTERED THEM BEFORE.
DAWN. WITH A SHUDDER NOT UNLIKE A DEATH RATTLE, HIS MOANS AND SPASMS CEASE.
HIS TERRORS ARE BANISHED FOR ANOTHER NIGHT, AND A FRIGHTENED LINETTE SLIPS BACK INTO SLUMBER.


SANTA MONICA, ALMOST A YEAR AFTER JHAGUR'S ARRIVAL ON EARTH:
THE JOB IS TO DIG A HOLE ONE BLOCK SQUARE AND FIVE STORIES DEEP THAT WILL EVENTUALLY ACCOMODATE AN OFFICE TOWER AND ITS UNDERGROUND PARKING STRUCTURE. MICK HEADS THE CREW.
GET BACK DOWN THERE, MULGREN! YOU JUST TOOK YOUR BREAK FIVE MINUTES AGO!
SAVE THE HARDASS ROUTINE FOR THEM TEENAGE DOPEHEADS AT THE SOUTH CORNER, WILLYA?
YOU'RE STARTIN' TO SOUND LIKE MY WIFE--EXCEPT NOT AS TOUGH.
I'M NOT KIDDING AROUND, PETE. WE'RE FALLING BEHIND SCHEDULE--
WILLYA JUST SHUDDUP AN' LISTEN A MINUTE? I FOUND SOMETHIN' DOWN THERE!
I THINK IT'S A ANTIQUE.
YOU READ A LOT, DON'TCHA--NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AN' ALL THAT GOOD SHIT? YOU TELL ME--
DID THEM ROCKS COME FROM K-MART--OR IS THIS MAYBE WORTH SOMETHIN'?
MICK? YOU OKAY?
VOID WE'RE GO!
:orruuhqr:
MICK? WHAT'S WRONG? DON'T JUST STAND THERE GROWLIN' LIKE A GODDAMN DOBERMAN--
--SPIT IT OUT!
HATE--YOU--
HATE YOU--!!
:uhnnph:
--YOU KILL YOU--
KILL YOU--HATE--
HEY--HEY! BREAK IT UP, YOU ASSHOLES!

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?! I THOUGHT HIM AND MULGREW GOT ALONG?
SHUT UP AN' HOLD 'IM, PUTZ!
CAN'TCHA SEE HE'S LOST IT?
HIS MIND'S BETWEEN HERE AN' VENUS!
GIMME THAT SPIKE, JAGGER-- OR YOUR HAND'S GONNA COME OFF WITH IT!
HAAATE!!
KIIILL!!

AAAH--BUTTON UP ALREADY!
HRRGH!

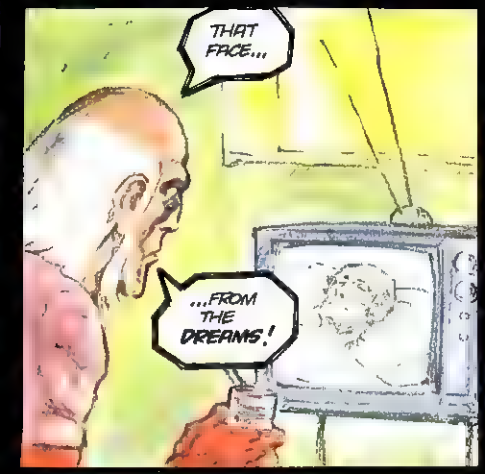

THINK THE SUN GOT TO HIM, CHET?
I THINK I DON'T GIVE A FLAMING INTERCOURSE!

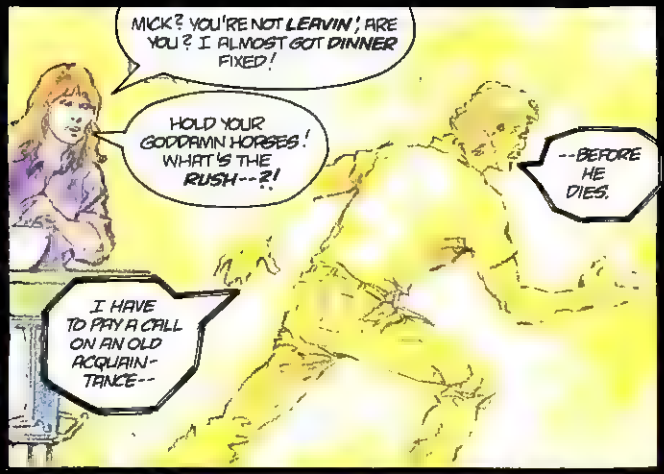
"CALL HIS GIRLFRIEND TO FETCH HIM HOME!"
UH... WANT SOME MORE TEA, RED?
NO.
YOU DO NOT BELIEVE ME, DO YOU?
AH...

IT WAS THE OBJECT I'VE SEEN IN MY DREAMS -- AND SO THEY MUST HAVE MEANING, AS I SUSPECTED.
THE FACES-- THE ANCIENT CITIES--I KNEW THEM, LONG AGO!
AND IF I'M EVER TO BE FREE OF THEM, I MUST SEARCH THEM OUT AGAIN!

SURE.
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK AT THE NEWS WHILE I GET DINNER?

"...U.S. MARINE POSITIONS IN LEBANON WERE AGAIN SUBJECTED TO HEAVY ARTILLERY FIRE BY MUSLIM GUERILLAS TODAY. CASUALTIES WERE DESCRIBED AS 'LIGHT'..."
"...TORNADO TORE A SWATCH OF DESTRUCTION THROUGH SOUTH-EAST MISSOURI YESTERDAY, DEVASTATING A 20-MILE STRIP OF HOMES AND BUSINESSES..."
"...WHILE, ACCORDING TO ECONOMIST MYRON MOOKE: 'BY THE YEAR 2000, FEDERAL DEFICITS MAY RISE BEYOND THE LEVEL AT WHICH EVEN PUNISHING TAXATION WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO...'"
"...AND A SAD STORY OUT OF LOS ANGELES, PENTATHALON GOLD MEDALIST DAVID TREPPER LIES NEAR DEATH IN DORMAN-CONNER MEDICAL CENTER, AS HIS TWO-YEAR BATTLE WITH MYASTHENIA GRAVIS, A DEGENERATIVE NEURO-MUSCULAR DISEASE, NEAR ITS TRAGIC CONCLUSION."
"DEBBIE TOKUGAWA SPOKE WITH THE ATHLETE'S MOTHER:"
"IS DAVID CONSCIOUS, MRS TREPPER?"
"HE'S MEDITATING. HE'S MADE A PRACTICE OF IT SINCE HE LEARNED HE HAD THE DISEASE."
"CAN HE SPEAK?"
"HE DOESN'T CONVERSE. HE CHANTS. RELIGIOUS THINGS: 'VOID INDIGO... ATH'AGAAR.' THEY MEAN SOMETHING TO HIM, I THINK."

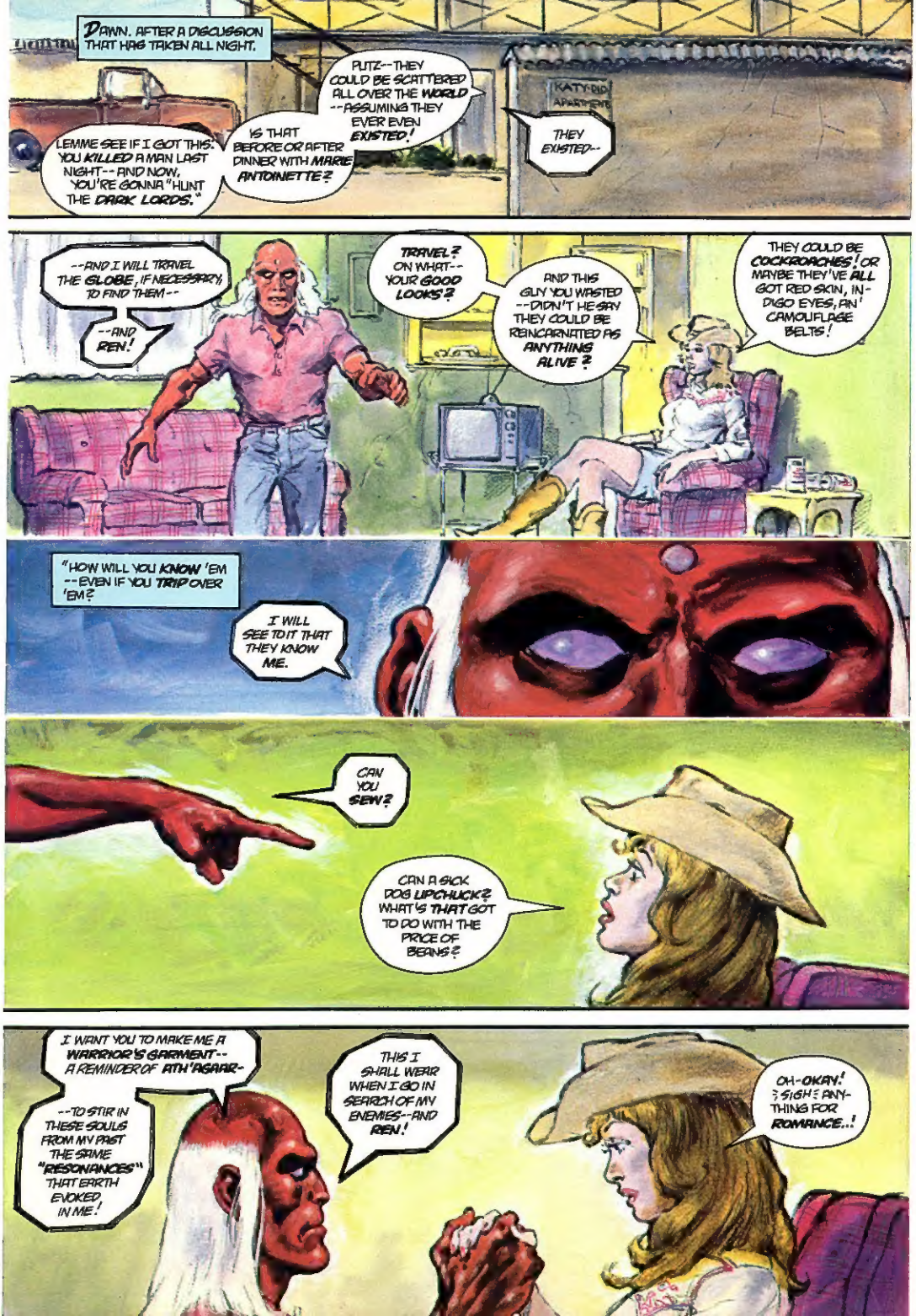

THAT FACE...
...FROM THE DREAMS!


MICK? YOU'RE NOT LEAVIN', ARE YOU? I ALMOST GOT DINNER FIXED!
HOLD YOUR GODDAMN HORSES! WHAT'S THE RUSH--?!
--BEFORE HE DIES.
I HAVE TO PAY A CALL ON AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE--

DORMAN-CONNER MEDICAL CENTER:
MR. TREPPER IS IN ROOM 1132...
...BUT HE'S ONLY SEEING FAMILY AND CLOSE FRIENDS.
I UNDERSTAND.
I MAY BE HIS OLDEST FRIEND ON EARTH.
I-I BEG YOUR PARDON? MY SON DOESN'T KNOW YOU...!
STAND AWAY FROM THE DOOR, PLEASE.
I AM GOING INSIDE.
I THINK HE DOES...!
OH GOD ...GUARD! GUARD!
I'M HERE, TREPPER. WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY DREAMS?
VOID INDIGO... VOID INDIGO...
...VOID... ING!...
ATH... ASAAR...
TALK TO ME, TREPPER--!
TELL ME ABOUT ATH'ASAAR --AND VOID INDIGO!!
L'LONG AGO... YOU WERE ATH'ASAAR...
...AND I...
...WAS KOTH...
...YOUR SLAYER!
TREPPER HALTINGLY RELATES THE TERRIBLE EVENTS OF 11,000 YEARS BEFORE... AND THE MOUNTING FURY IN JHAGUR'S SOUL BURNS AWAY ANY DOUBT THAT THE TALE IS TRUE.

WHEN THE STORY OF THOSE ANCIENT NIGHTS HAS BEEN TOLD, TREPPER SPEAKS OF THE PRESENT-- AND THE FUTURE.
"OUR FIRST CONFRONTATION...OCCURED IN AN AGE...OF BARBARISM... AND CATACLYSM. THE VOID COULD NOT... GATHER OUR SOULS TOGETHER AGAIN... UNTIL ANOTHER SUCH AGE WAS UPON THE EARTH."
HE DRAWS IN A WHEEZING, TORTURED BREATH, THEN: "THIS...HAS NOW COME TO PASS.
"HUMANS HAVE AGAIN...TURNED CRUEL, PETTY ...FORESAKEN ALL IDEALS, EXCEPT POWER... AND SURVIVAL. WORSE, THEY LIE TO THEMSELVES ...LOOK ONLY TO THE LIGHT...CANNOT BEAR TO FACE...THE DARKNESS IN THEIR NATURE." HE PAUSES, COUGHING PAINFULLY.
"HEMLITH...EEYOD...ZEPHARR--THEY, TOO, LIVE AGAIN--IN OTHER BODIES--BY OTHER NAMES. AND THEY ARE...PART OF THIS LIE.
"I'VE GUIDED YOU, IN YOUR DREAMS ...TO THE SPIKE ...TO THIS REVELATION...
"BUT I CAN... TAKE YOU... NO FURTHER. YOU MUST HUNT DOWN THE OTHERS --AND REN--"
GUARD--IN HERE!!
--AND LEARN... WHAT THE VOID ...WISHES FROM YOU...!
IT IS TIME ...FOR YOUR VENEGEANCE...
...AND FOR MY DEATH... ATH'AGAAR.
AN INDIGO INSTANT LATER, TREPPER HAS GONE TO JOIN ETERNITY.
AND BEFORE HIS DISTRAUGHT MOTHER AND THE HOSPITAL SECURITY GUARD CAN ENTER THE ROOM...

...THE FACE OF HIS ASSAILANT HAS BEEN CONCEALED BY THE TRUTH.
EEAAGH!
OH, GAWD --THE SMELL! I'M GONNA BE --urrgh!
STOP HIM! STOP THAT MAN!!
BUT THE GUARD IS TOO NAUSEOUS--
--AND THE REST OF THE STAFF TOO STUNNED BY THE INTRUDER'S BIZARRE APPEARANCE!
BY THE TIME THEY REGAIN THEIR COMPOSURE, JHAGUR IS DOWN THE STAIRS... OUT OF THE BUILDING...
...ACROSS THE PARKING LOT... AND LOST IN THE SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT.
SIX MINUTES LATER, AND FIVE BLOCKS AWAY, MICHAEL JAGGER CATCHES A BUS HOME TO NORTH HOLLYWOOD.


DAWN. AFTER A DISCUSSION THAT HAS TAKEN ALL NIGHT.
LEMME SEE IF I GOT THIS: YOU KILLED A MAN LAST NIGHT-- AND NOW, YOU'RE GONNA "HUNT THE DARK LORDS."
IS THAT BEFORE OR AFTER DINNER WITH MARIE ANTOINETTE?
PLITZ--THEY COULD BE SCATTERED ALL OVER THE WORLD --ASSUMING THEY EVER EVEN EXISTED!
KATY-DID APARTMENTS
THEY EXISTED--
--AND I WILL TRAVEL THE GLOBE, IF NECESSARY, TO FIND THEM--
--AND REN!
TRAVEL? ON WHAT-- YOUR GOOD LOOKS?
AND THIS GUY YOU WASTED --DIDN'T HE SAY THEY COULD BE REINCARNATED AS ANYTHING ALIVE?
THEY COULD BE COCKROACHES! OR MAYBE THEY'VE ALL GOT RED SKIN, INDIGO EYES, AN' CAMOUFLAGE BELTS!
"HOW WILL YOU KNOW 'EM --EVEN IF YOU TRIP OVER 'EM?
I WILL SEE TO IT THAT THEY KNOW ME.
CAN YOU SEW?
CAN A SICK DOG LIPCHUCK? WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH THE PRICE OF BEANS?
I WANT YOU TO MAKE ME A WARRIOR'S GARMENT-- A REMINDER OF ATH'AGAAR-
--TO STIR IN THESE SOULS FROM MY PAST THE SAME "RESONANCES" THAT EARTH EVOKED IN ME!
THIS I SHALL WEAR WHEN I GO IN SEARCH OF MY ENEMIES--AND REN!
OH-OKAY! SIGH ANYTHING FOR ROMANCE..!

SOME NIGHTS LATER...
I DUNNO... I CAN'T TELL WHETHER YOU LOOK MORE LIKE A WARRIOR--OR A FLASHDANCER--
--BUT I LIKE IT!
THEY WILL KNOW. THAT IS WHAT MATTERS.
AND SO THE FINAL HUNT BEGINS. ARMED WITH A NEWLY-FORGED VERSION OF THE SWORD HE WIELDED AS ATH'ASAAR, JHASUR VENTURES FORTH TO SEARCH OUT THE DARK LORDS--TO DISCOVER HIS DESTINY--AND TO FIND A LOVE DENIED HIM FOR 11,000 YEARS.

Logo Design **Ron Fontes** • Lettering **Andy Kubert** • Editors **Laurie Sutton & Archie Goodwin** • Editor in Chief **Jim Shooter**